

Offline – online relations in the Digital Age

A study of lived Internet experience within a group of professional
Bolivian women

Denisse Bellini Morales



Dissertation for the degree philosophiae doctor (PhD)
at the University of Bergen

2014

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2014

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AIT OSLO AS / University of Bergen

SCIENTIFIC ENVIRONMENT

The present PhD dissertation is the result of a study conducted under the academic shelter of the University of Bergen in Norway and financially supported by the Norwegian government Quota Scheme for students from developing countries. The researcher is Bolivian and the main part of the research was conducted in Bolivia, but the theoretical analysis and report writing took place at the University of Bergen, Department of Linguistic, Literary and Aesthetic Studies within the area of Digital Culture. As once stated on its webpage¹, “Digital Culture is focused on humanities-driven investigations of the role that contemporary technologies have in shaping our relationship with each other and to the world”. Hence, as it will be seen in the following pages, this study conforms to the given concept of Digital Culture.

¹ University of Bergen, information website. LLE Department. Digital Culture. Retrieved October 2011
<http://www.uib.no/lle/en/education/digital-culture>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are several persons to whom I would like to extend my thanks for their support throughout my PhD years:

Hilde Corneliussen, my supervisor, for her substantial and wise guidance and Ana Beatriz Chiquito, my co-supervisor, for being an indispensable bridge between Latin American and Scandinavian cultures.

The Digital Culture group at UiB, especially Rolf Beev, Daniel Apollon, Patricia Tomaszek and Silje Hommedal, and all the LLE staff which has always been very supportive and helped me cope with the unavoidable administrative problems a foreigner faces in a new environment.

I also want to thank Univalle support in Bolivia, most notably Germán Rico Ramallo the former postgraduate director, and all the staff who made my work possible while I was there.

I am also greatly indebted to the women who were my research subjects and who generously gave their time to participate in this study.

A special mention goes to my proofreader Graham Wood for both his professionalism and patience.

And lastly, but by no means least, my infinite gratitude goes to my mother who has had the patience and love to accept my absence and the tyranny of distance for all these years.

**“We gather other people’s experiences because
they allow us to become more experienced
ourselves”**

(Van Manen 1990: 62)

ABSTRACT

TO EXPERIENCE THE INTERNET

The focus of my research is on how a group of women from Bolivia experience the Internet. All the women in the group are professionals who are undergoing training on a postgraduate educational programme, and which requires use of the Internet on a daily basis.

Experience is a key concept of the study. To get an understanding of this elusive and debatable concept, a qualitative study was conducted based on the analysis of interviews, undertaken both individually and in group. The chosen methodology for interpreting the accounts of these women mixes elements of narrative and discourse analysis which allows one to go beyond a simple descriptive presentation of Internet access and its uses.

The epistemological and theoretical principles, which draw upon different proposals within feminist studies, provide a base on which we can build an understanding of the subject of the study from within the context. This reading offers a vision of an intertwined presence of subjective and structural elements which constitute the Internet experience. Therefore, emotions such as fear, guilt, satisfaction and hope are discussed; but also factors such as the family, education, economy and other relevant cultural aspects from which gender-aware individuals produce meaning and give sense to their lives. In short, this study is presented as a broad exploration of the topic, rather than a definitive and replicable explanation.

Keywords: Internet, women, experience, narrative analysis, phenomenology, discourse, feminist studies, culture, Bolivia.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

What would happen if tomorrow you could not access the Internet?

“Oh! It would be very difficult, I would feel so isolated...” (Olga, 32)

“Without the Internet life would just be boring” (Clara, 34)

“I’d die, I can’t live without it...” – giggles- (Isa, 48)

The above responses came from three Bolivian women who took part in a research project aimed at reaching an understanding on how the Internet is experienced. This dissertation presents the outcomes from this research and attempts to undertake a thorough exploration of the above topic.

It was back in 2001 that Singh claimed that studies which focused exclusively on quantitative data regarding gender and internet use were losing relevance; it was obvious women were using computers and the Internet in a massive scale all over of the world. It was therefore clear to her that it was more important to work with qualitative studies, ones in which the experiences and perceptions of women were the main focus; topics thus raised would include Women and Technology, Women and Cognition, Women and Communication, and Women, Technology and Culture (Singh 2001: 407).

All the topics Singh mentions have always been of particular interest to me, so when I got the opportunity to undertake research for a PhD I was convinced that my work would be related to women and the Internet in my country, Bolivia. I was, of course, yet to realize the extent of an ongoing global debate over the issues of gender and technology. In Bolivia, studies dealing with gender and/or women are almost always related to the idea of development and empowerment.

There is a strong emphasis on women from the rural areas, women from impoverished communities, women who suffer domestic violence or any kind of deprivation, or women who are involved in social and political activism. Research is hardly ever interested in the ‘developed woman’ from the ‘underdeveloped world’. I use both terms here in a stereotypical and metaphorical way for I recognize that ‘human and world development’ as a notion is open to a lot of debate. Thus, my idea from the beginning was to work with women who did not fit into what Mohanty (1984) calls the “monolithic” definition of ‘third world women’. My intention in this work is to look beyond stereotypes, in this case of a woman who is poor, illiterate and technological ignorant, to the urban, professional woman who has an interest in and works with the latest technology. I therefore decided to explore how a group of highly educated and middle class female postgraduate students in Cochabamba, Bolivia engage with information and communication technology, specifically the Internet, and how they narrate their experience. Most of the women in this group were school and university teachers.

One of Singh’s research findings was that women who are not used to using technology tend to think of it in masculine terms. As with money and power, technology for many women has a masculine connotation. But then, she claims, once technology becomes part of their daily lives it is redefined as a useful tool. “It is the technologies that women are not comfortable with, that are seen as technologies. Hence the very definition of technology has women’s discomfort at its centre” (Singh 2001: 407). When women become comfortable with technology, they do not see its complexity anymore, but just the activity. This is the case with the group of Bolivian women involved in this research and the Internet; for them this technology is integrated into their daily routines and activities in a natural way. In other words, the Internet has already been

‘domesticated’² or incorporated into the private realm of the household (Silverstone 2005).

When we say that technology undergoes a process of ‘domestication’, we mean that “it has been integrated into the structures, daily routines and values of users and their environments” (Berker 2006: 2). The telephone and the television, for example, have been so well integrated in our daily lives that we do not think of them as complex technological devices, but rather as activities we perform; we talk on the phone and we watch TV. This technology has become part of the household; it has been domesticated like a pet which forms part of the family (ibid.: 3). We can perceive devices such as computers and the Internet in the same way, we do not wonder at their potential or complexity anymore, we simply think of writing an e-mail, setting up a video conference or browsing the net, although this is done with varying degrees of complexity depending on the individual. This domestication process is not a prerogative of the ‘developed world’; it also happens in countries like Bolivia and at a faster pace than we might imagine.

As all societies and cultures are therefore becoming more reliant on this advancing information technology, there is a corresponding need to further understand our daily interaction with it. Attempting to understand the role of technology in our everyday lives is a way to understand our lives in the modern world (Berker 2006). This understanding does not imply a knowledge of circuits, connections or wires, rather an appreciation of our interactions, possibilities and limits as human beings. Heidegger, the phenomenological German philosopher, once said: “The essence of technology is by no means anything technological” (Heidegger 2003: 252). Thus, in this research, I very much adhere to phenomenological principles. This is because phenomenology is usually not interested in providing proof or empirical generalization, nor is it interested in

² ICT domestication involves various activities such as commodification, appropriation and conversion. More on these concepts and the technological domestication idea can be found in Silverstone, R. and L. Haddon (1996). "Design and the domestication of ICTs: technical change and everyday life." Communication by design. The politics of information and communication technologies: 44-74.

solving problems, but rather it concerns itself with finding answers to questions of meaning and experience.

From the outset my main objective was to gain an understanding on how the Internet is experienced rather than what the Internet is, and therefore undertaking a qualitative study was the natural path to follow. Quantitative studies still have a role to play, but qualitative methodological choices relate more to the researcher's aims. So, in this particular case I considered it better to stop and ask why we do the things we do and what we think about them. Most of the time we just take our thoughts, behaviours and actions for granted, rarely stopping to reflect on the underlying motivations, and their causes, consequences and effects. To reflect in this way may lead to a change in our understanding, for we start to see ourselves and our world from different perspectives. Lindseth and Norberg claim that "when our look on phenomena changes, our behaviour will also change" (2004: 151). So, even if this research does not call for specific responses, the exploration of the main topic will hopefully provide new perspectives from which to reflect upon both the Internet practice of my subjects of study and of Internet practice in general.

1.2 POINT OF DEPARTURE: THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There are many topics discussed throughout this dissertation; the range is evident at all levels, from theoretical background to data analysis. This type of approach aims at comprehensively answering the question of how the Internet can be experienced. Lindseth and Norberg say that "if we miss the opportunity to reflect on our own experiences, we will hardly find a way to improve our practice..." (2004: 148). However, I have to acknowledge from the outset that "experience is itself tantalizing and elusive. In a sense, pure experience is never accessible; we witness it after the event. Therefore, when we speak of doing research which aims to get at experience what we really mean is we are trying to do research which is

‘experience close’” (Smith, Flowers et al. 2009: 33). So, my challenge here is to get close enough to this complex, yet fascinating, concept of experience.³

As already mentioned at the start of this chapter, the focus of my research is the women on one hand and the Internet on the other; and if I put the notion of ‘experience’ at the core of this ‘women-Internet’ relationship, the research question is about the Internet experience of a particular group of women in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The search for an answer has led me to explore some key topics that are currently of major public interest; these include gender, technology and education.⁴ They will all be studied taking into account the specifics of the context. Bolivia is a nation comprised of diversity and where ‘hybridization’ is the essence of a culture in which the nature of socio-political-economic conditions affects Internet infrastructure, consumption and use. I place an emphasis on the contextualization process as I maintain that the context contains the main factors that favour either technological inclusion or exclusion with the consequent barriers or motivations to using the Internet.

Although, this study includes descriptive data such as elements of contextual information about the country in which the women live, their immediate surroundings and their Internet conditions; the main focus is on the interpretative work which I develop to relate this contextual information with their personal accounts. In other words, the material under analysis is contained within the textual transcription of the interviews conducted with the women. The data analysis concentrates on a close reading of their ‘told-lived-experience’ on how they access, use and feel the Internet. Thus, taking into account my methodological choices to answer the general question, a specific sub-question could be formulated as follows: *how do these women narratively and discursively express their experience with the Internet?* Therefore, description and

³ More about this concept is developed in chapter four. See page 94

⁴ The promotion of gender equality, the empowerment of women, education, availability of new technology among others, are objectives outlined within the report ‘United Nations Millennium Development Goals’ for 2015. See <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/global.shtml>

interpretation are key aspects in the analysis in order to explore how the women construct meaning while experiencing the Internet.

1.3 PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC RELEVANCE

The selection of an area of study has as much to do with unexplored academic fields as with the researcher's specific fields of interests. Ideally, then, whenever possible, the researcher should look to a specific topic to combine both the elements of academic contribution and personal satisfaction. As noted earlier, this dissertation adopts a qualitative approach for which I developed a special interest during my academic studies. What attracted me most to this approach, probably consciously and unconsciously, is that qualitative methodology takes the "subjectivity of the researcher and of those being studied as part of the research process" (Flick 2006: 16).

I must admit that my own experience was the source of inspiration in formulating the questions which guide my research. Since becoming widely available in the urban areas of Bolivia in the late 1990s, I have used the Internet on a daily basis and have been amazed at the characteristics and possibilities of the new 'world' with which I connected. This made me wonder what other people were doing with it and inside it, and how they were experiencing it. However, 'people' was too much of an abstract concept; as a matter of fact, I was interested in my neighbours, my friends and especially other women. After a little investigation, I realized that qualitative studies on information technology in general and on the Internet specifically were scarce in my country and unavailable to the general public.

Generally speaking, research undertaken in third world countries, and specifically cooperation programmes financed by public funds and Non-Governmental Organizations place a strong emphasis on the social conditions of the poor, the majority of which live in rural areas. Even though there is no comparative statistical reference about the number of studies focused on rural and urban areas,

a quick look at the available research undertaken by academic institutions reveals a great interest in deprived social groups. An example of this is the collection of books and articles contained within the CLACSO⁵ (Latin American Social Science Council) network of virtual libraries.

In Bolivia there are some isolated studies about the Internet and about gender but rarely is their joint impact considered. When it comes to studying the Internet the focus has been mostly on the technical aspects involving much quantitative data, and when speaking about gender issues the approach has been mostly qualitative. Scientific research in the so-called 'Third World' is, to say the least, somewhat scant. Qualitative research in developing countries seems to purposely ignore topics related to technology as if these topics were solely a prerogative of 'advanced' societies. In general, studies on topics regarding cutting edge technology are often left in the hands of the creators of such technology, 'First World' and not in those of the consumers who inhabit the whole world.

In Bolivia, the explosion in availability of the new information technologies has had a great impact on society. While pre-industrial techniques and tools are still in use in some rural areas, the cities are experiencing a huge increase in computer and mobile phone consumerism. Information and communication technologies, ICTs, have facilitated the consumption of the Internet in a country in which the demographic is a majority of young people and where the rapid growth of the cities is at the expense of rural communities. Governmental and non-governmental organizations are usually concerned with on how to provide technological resources and training to those in need, but often neglect to observe and study the appropriation process and the meaning of such technologies in people's lives.

⁵ 'El Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales' (CLACSO) is an International non-governmental institution created in 1967 closely linked to UNESCO. Nowadays it brings together 302 research centres and higher education programmes involved with Social Sciences from Latin American and Caribbean countries, The United States and Europe.

Technological change is not the only change that Bolivia is experiencing right now. There are major social transformations currently underway which are reshaping the unique character of the country; indigenous people in general and women and girls from across the social strata have gained higher profiles and leading roles in the public sphere over the last few decades. I, therefore, came to the logical conclusion that women deserve to be the subject of research in their own right. Therefore, unconsciously, ‘feminist empiricism’ was my epistemological point of departure.

Lykke (2010) explains that the concept of ‘feminist empiricism’ introduced by Harding (1986) refers to the idea of “making women visible in scholarly knowledge production, via empirical research women are made visible in terms of their experiences and perspectives, their contributions to society and culture, and their social, cultural and bodily conditions of life” (Lykke 2010: 128). My desire from the outset was to reveal the experience of a specific group of women, not women who happen to be ‘invisible’ due to their powerlessness, but women who are ‘invisible’ because of their perceived comfortable middle-class position in society. Hence, the focus of my attention is on women from the urban context since it is there where information technology is predominantly available, accessed and used.

To know what the leading social groups are doing with the technology available to them is a good societal thermometer that reveals how transformations are taking place, how the local fuses with the global, how cultures are in a constant process of re-affirmation and re-creation, and how all individuals, men or women, are part of the unavoidable process of appropriation and interpretation of new technologies. Last but not least, using Castell’s terminology, being able to understand how women appropriate technology and technological advances contributes to understanding the role of women in the construction of an ‘information society’ in ‘the information age’.

1.4 SUBJECTS OF STUDY AND OBJECT OF STUDY

The women I selected to form the group for this study all conformed to certain criteria⁶, i.e. they all displayed the characteristics that were relevant to the objectives of my research. In other words, I followed the strategy of ‘purposive sampling’. The women were educated, undertaking a postgraduate course related to technology and education, and had access to the Internet and used it daily. The fact that most of them were teachers in contact with large groups of students either at a school or university and the resulting ability to work with various individuals, especially youth, gave more weight to their opinions on this matter. Although they all came from different undergraduate fields, the women were very much aware of research practices and were involved in research themselves; this, I think, resulted in them being highly cooperative in this study. This is interesting and relevant as is not often that a researcher gets the opportunity to research other researchers.

My subjects of study are nineteen women who represent the whole population of a master course in a private university in Cochabamba, Bolivia. They all participated in my research on a volunteer basis and they all signed a consent form that assured them anonymity and confidentiality. I must make it clear here that these nineteen women are the subjects of my study but not the object of my study. The object of study is their various accounts, narratives and discourses that came under the lens of analysis following the full transcription of the individual interviews and the focus group data, which were the only qualitative methods used in the gathering of information. The reasons for this choice are explained in detail in the methodological framework presented in chapter three.

⁶ As qualitative research is concerned with meaning and not generalizations, the sample tends to be small. “Qualitative samples must be large enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered”. In general most authors who discuss qualitative methodology agree that samples should be less than 50, interview studies around 20, and specific phenomenological studies around 5 to 20. “Qualitative samples are drawn to reflect the purpose and aims of the study”, although the concept of ‘saturation’ (an elastic notion) is often used to define the number of the sample with researchers usually using a quota that allows them to consider their analysis as “finished”. Mason, M. (2010). Sample Size and Saturation in PhD Studies Using Qualitative Interviews.

The analysis of the data basically involves description and interpretation, though the balance of the two changes throughout the process. The way I understand these two aspects is very much phenomenologically informed. Phenomenology is interested in making a structural analysis of the most common and self-evident situations. Here a parenthesis must be made to explain why the terms ‘phenomenology’ and ‘hermeneutics’ usually come together and some authors even make no distinction between the two. Van Manen (1990: 25) clarifies that phenomenology refers to the pure description of lived experience while hermeneutics refers to the interpretation of the experience in a symbolic form. However, in reference to Gadamer, he points out that when we interpret a meaning of something we are, in fact, interpreting an interpretation (ibid.: 26). In short, hermeneutical phenomenology stands for interpretative description, where the description is always an interpretation in itself, one of many that in turn is validated by the lived experience. But phenomenology is not the only theoretical and methodological strand I drew upon when analysing the women’s responses, although it establishes a necessary epistemological starting point. In my quest for a better understanding I develop specific conceptual frames according to the topics which are being covered.

Let us return to my research subjects. I consider that they merit an introduction on who they are as individuals from the outset since they are the ones who are providing all the raw material for this dissertation; this is in addition to a presentation of each of the women’s individual characteristics in chapter five. I usually opened the interviews with questions aimed at getting acquainted with the women and which could also help in putting them at their ease during the process. It was not uncommon that they would ask about my research, either at the beginning or the end of the interviews, questions that I gladly answered. So, my first question was aimed at knowing them better while letting them say whatever they wished about who they were. Even though this question was not directly related to my main topic of interest, it is worth noting that in general their answers led me to conclude that these women were self-assured and proud of

what they had accomplished so far in their lives. Typically, the women elaborated their first answer by highlighting their work, professional career and studies. Here are a couple of examples to illustrate this:

“I am an economist. I have a master in Rural Development, two postgraduate degrees, one in Education and the other in Social Project Evaluation... I am a university teacher and my dream is to teach at the Public University... ...I am also a housewife. I am married, I have a daughter. My family is small but it is a constant struggle to keep it together, to have all the things in place, to be in charge of my child, my husband, etc. We live with my parents and I get a lot of help from them. Another dream I have is to follow in my dad’s footsteps, he was also a teacher and a researcher...” (Tati, 33).

“Above all, I am a woman, I am a Bolivian woman with higher education, I teach computing, I also teach accounting, which is my second subject. Since I am a teacher I need to update my skills continuously... I am a serious person, a fighter, with goals and objectives as well as a lot of experience” (Fanny, 38).

Although it is not possible to introduce all the women it is worth mentioning that, despite their individual differences, they made up a very compact group. Although there were some in their late 20s and late 40s, most of them were in their 30s. Although half of them had studied in private schools and the other half in public schools, which demonstrates a difference in the acquisitive power of their families, they had all finished university studies and were ‘middle class’⁷ professional workers. Although half of them were married and the other half single, they would all mention family as a central element in their lives. Although, they all learnt about computers and the Internet in different periods of their lives, they were all ‘digital immigrants’ with similar computer skills. And, most importantly of all, they were all part of the same educational programme

⁷ ‘Middle class’ is the term used by the women when asked about their social and economic position in society.

which made them classmates and friends who would be interacting with each other on a daily basis, either in person or virtually.

In short, the way in which they all introduced themselves made clear that they were women who very much valued professional ambition, success in their studies, economic independence and family values. And the work ahead in this dissertation is to disclose part of their Internet technology experience based upon an interpretation of the following: what they wanted us to know, what they wished to reveal, and even what they could have hidden or ignored. It has to be said that my interpretation is only one possible reading of the resulting text, and my reading is not one grounded in the empiricist notion of objectivity, for such a thing is an “impossible project” (Cosgrove 2000).

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE PRESENT DISSERTATION

This chapter is aimed at a concise introduction to the topic of my research and its relevance. The remaining eight chapters are an attempt to answer, hopefully in a consistent way, the main research question as outlined here. Chapter two provides contextual information in relation to the subjects of study and the Internet. An overview of Bolivia as a country is given, then four key cultural aspects are discussed: society, education, economy, and technological and Internet conditions. These four are the elements which bear most relevance in the analysis to come in the latter part of this dissertation.

Chapter three deals with the methodological framework, or the main research principles, I adopted to conduct my analysis. I introduce everything from the epistemological considerations to the methods of data collection and data analysis. My methodological choices are in accordance to the theories discussed later as well as the main research paradigms. Firstly, questions of objectivity, pragmatism and eclecticism are discussed within the logic of qualitative research. Then the characteristics of narrative and discourse analysis are developed. Finally, the empirical material and the data collection process are presented.

The theoretical considerations are developed in chapter four. Principles of feminist studies are discussed, as well as theories, which have inspired my analysis and which give a frame for understanding the much debated notion of experience. Thus, phenomenological to post-structuralist paradigm considerations are given and notions from specific theories like intersectionality or postcolonialism are presented.

Chapter five opens the analysis of the empirical material with descriptive data about who the women are and their patterns of Internet access and use. It also systematizes most of the information provided in the interviews in relation to the women's computer and Internet background and their online activity and Internet skills. The contextual information becomes much more specific to the women's lives in this chapter.

From chapters six to eight the idea is to peel back the varied layers that make up the women's Internet experience. Even though each one is an individual and lives in a distinct way, many commonalities are analyzed because culture is the common ground upon which the women's group identity is built.

Factors related to economy and education emerged from the interviews as being relevant topics in relation to the Internet. The importance of both these elements is demonstrated in chapter six. From a macro-structural level they affect and impact individual perceptions and actions in the online world. Offline economy and offline education have an online counterpart that is affected by the former; however, online economic possibilities and online education are perceived in their unique contextual specificities by the women.

Chapter seven demonstrates how family and close social relations help form the nature of much online activity. In most cases, and by varying degrees, family, provides the answer to where, when and why these women are on the Internet. This chapter also introduces the discussion about gender by making the point how human experience is only possible through an act of embodiment.

Our experiences not only result from the outer world being processed by our senses but also from a permanent inner dialogue that goes well beyond our reasoning and touches our emotions. Chapter eight demonstrates how emotions and feelings such as fear, guilt, satisfaction and hope are all present in the apparent instrumental use and rationally expressed Internet experience.

The idea underlying the sequence of the analytical chapters is to approach the object of study, the women's Internet experience, as a metaphorical dissection going inwards from the outside. This starts out from the macro-structural factors of the context, such as economy and education, passes through the intimate spheres of social relationships and family, cuts through the skin of the body, and finally arrives at the intangibility of the emotions which affect and are affected by the specific experience of the women. Chapter nine therefore faces the challenge of tying together all the elements discussed in the previous chapters and reconstructing the previous deconstruction, the metaphorical dissection. Chapter nine assembles the sketches that were made and uses colour in an attempt to depict the whole landscape; but we have to remember that any painting only shows what the painter sees, and from the perspective he/she decides to present. There may well be better or worse techniques and styles in painting, ways of using the brush and applying colour, but an appreciation of the finished work that is something which is left to the viewer's critical eye and subjective opinion.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

“Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia”, the famous maxim written in 1914 by the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset⁸ that translated into English as ‘me and my circumstances’ or ‘I am I and what is around me’, highlights the importance of the world in which we live in giving meaning to our existence. Contextualizing the object of study is not only a way to introduce it, but also the first necessary step in its analysis. Since selecting the different contextual aspects and levels is methodological and theoretically linked, I present here the main reasons for the elements I decided to prioritize.

My subjects of study belong to a specific culture; therefore, the subjects’ experience (in a broad sense) is constructed, affected and transformed both by and within that culture. Culture, Castells explains, can be understood as “a set of values and beliefs informing behaviour. Repetitive patterns of behaviour generate customs that are enforced by institutions, as well as by informal social organizations” (Castells 2002: 36). Therefore, to set the women in time and space calls for a presentation of the country they live in and its main cultural characteristics. However, today’s ‘globalized’ world creates the need to extend the contextualization to regional and international levels as this allows us to work with similarities and differences that aid in the analysis of the phenomenon. That is the reason why extending the presentation to a Latin American context is a conscious choice, firstly because some of the authors quoted here demonstrate that Latin American countries share crucial historical and cultural elements which produce undeniable commonalities. As a matter of fact this allowed the emergence of ‘Latin American studies’ as a proper discipline where the shared

⁸ From ‘Meditaciones del Quijote’ 1914. José Ortega y Gasset. Spanish philosopher and essayist.

culture of so many countries is the unifying idea. Secondly, the fact that intellectual and academic Bolivian production is scarce, has restricted distribution and is only available within certain institutions, posed the challenge of having to work with the limited public information available.

Any object of study within humanities belongs to culture. A cultural analysis does not present objects in isolation “but as things always-already engaged, as interlocutors, within the larger culture from which they have emerged. It also means that ‘analysis’ looks to issues of cultural debates. ...While concepts are products of philosophy and tools of analysis, they are also embodiments of the cultural practices we seek to understand through them” (Bal and Marx-MacDonald 2002: 9-12). Castells whose work deals with a global vision of the ‘information society’, defines nations as “cultural communes constructed in people’s minds and collective memory by the sharing of history and political projects” (Castells 2004: 54). He also states that language especially is “a fundamental attribute of self-recognition, and of the establishment of an invisible national boundary less arbitrary than territoriality, and less exclusive than ethnicity” (ibid.: 55). Therefore, Bolivian identity has been constructed and is still being constructed on the shared cultural attributes of the whole Latin American region. The paradox here is that diversity and inequality are some of the main distinctive cultural attributes.

Latin America is by far “the most unequal region of the world” (Gootenberg 2010: 1). In colonial times, ethnicity and gender were to a large extent the basis for class and status differences, while nowadays these aspects have been blurred by more specific factors such as occupation, parental occupation, gender, place of residence, and above all, the family and an individual’s education (Reygadas 2010: 31). However, the region is also a hotbed of cultural movements that are struggling to build all kinds of social bridges.

Under the following subheadings apart from providing a general overview of the characteristics of Bolivia as a country, I chose to emphasize certain cultural

aspects such as society, education and economy as well as the panorama of the Internet technology as they are key elements for later analysis of the empirical material in this research. However, this does not mean that the following chapters discard the contextualization process; on the contrary, linking the women's experience to their cultural setting is a constant exercise in order to produce a sound analysis.

2.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THE COUNTRY: BOLIVIA

Bolivia, whose official name is the Plurinational State of Bolivia, is a landlocked country situated in the central part of South America. According to the national census in 2012⁹ its population is around 10.4 million. Its major cities are La Paz, Santa Cruz and Cochabamba. The last two have undergone a major socio-economic growth in the last few decades. The main language spoken is Spanish, although there are many other official languages spoken as well, especially by indigenous people. It is a secular state that guarantees freedom of religion, and the Catholic religion, imported by the Spaniards mingles with popular beliefs and rituals. Historically, religion has always had a strong influence and many social activities are dictated by religious events.

Bolivia is a democracy which has been governed by the first 'non-white' president Evo Morales Ayma, who is of indigenous origin, since 2005. During his presidency many major reforms have been implemented with the aim of socializing resources and reducing the extreme levels of poverty. According to the classification of the United Nations and other worldwide organizations, Bolivia (a country of young people, 36% of its total population being under 15 years old and the median age being 22)¹⁰, belongs to the group of co-called 'developing countries'. A 'developing country' is one that has an undeveloped industrial base and a moderate to low Human Development Index (HDI) rating and per capita income, but is in a phase of economic development. According to

⁹ Instituto Nacional de Estadística –Bolivia. Census data 2012.

<http://www.ine.gob.bo/pdf/ResultadosPreliminaresCenso2012.pdf>

¹⁰ According to the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, www.kff.org

the most recent United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)¹¹ HDI report in 2013, Bolivia is 108 (out of 187) in the world country ranking, being the poorest nation in the South American region.

The HDI measures average achievements in a country, but it does not incorporate the degree of gender imbalance in these achievements. The global gender gap index (GGI)¹², however, examines the gap between men and women in four fundamental categories: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival. The index is constructed to rank countries on their gender gaps, not on their development level. The final value is bound between 1 (equality) and 0 (inequality), thus allowing for comparisons relative to ideal standards of equality in addition to relative country rankings. Bolivia, in the World Economic Forum report for the year 2012, scores 0.722, which is quite high at a global and regional level, consequently ranking 30 out of 135 countries. Bolivia has rapidly gone up the ranking in recent years as it has been taking measures to promote of gender equality and better education within the frame of the United Nations Development Millennium Goals. However, there is a high level of socio-economic inequality and formal job positions are scarce, a situation that produced and is still producing a significant migratory phenomenon especially to neighbouring countries, the United States and Europe.

This short overview is the general frame in which more specific aspects are developed. Thus, the following subheadings describe key aspects about the country in more detail: societal characteristics, educational conditions, the economic system and technological development with the aim of providing a general panorama of the elements which will be discussed later during the analysis of the women's interviews. Although these elements are never static and are in constant transformation, as culture itself is, they are presented here in as a

¹¹ United Nations Development Programme (2013)
http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR2013_EN_Summary.pdf

¹² World Economic Forum (2012) www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2012.pdf

kind of snapshot to assist in the analysis. In this way it will be easier to link the context to the interpretation of the different discussed topics.

2.2.1 SOCIETY

Bolivia is a blend of Hispanic and pre-Hispanic cultural elements. Due to its history different ethnic groups shape a complex class system. Nowadays Bolivia is basically made up of a small number of whites and a larger group of 'mestizos' with a range of subgroups in between. Traditionally the white minority occupy the top rung on the class ladder. For Klein, the way Bolivian society has evolved through the years is "one of the more complex and fascinating of human histories" creating a vital multi-ethnic environment (2003: xi). According to Sanabria, "class, culture (including ethnicity, language, religious beliefs), and race (physical characteristics) overlap, coexist and mark the social hierarchy" (2001: 249). This is why the current Constitution, enacted in 2009, labels Bolivia as a 'Plurinational State' replacing the term 'Republic' of previous constitutions. Peasants, unskilled workers and those in the 'informal' economic sector who live in urban peripheries are the ones who are the most disadvantaged in Bolivia. Most of these people are referred to as 'Indians' due to their racial characteristics, they have very little formal education, and they speak mainly in an indigenous language. Because of the prestige of Spanish, monolingual Spanish speakers are constantly increasing while those speaking only native language are decreasing. 'Cholos' (considered by many a pejorative term) constitute an intermediate category. They are phenotypically almost identical to "Indians" but more assimilated to Western cultural norms and more likely to have command of Spanish and formal education. 'Whites', the people from Spanish descent are at the top of the social pyramid. Historically they have constituted the powerful economic and political elite and do not identify with the Andean or another native heritage (Sanabria 2001). If we were to divide social classes into terms of the traditional low, middle and high class, 'cholos' could be positioned at a low

middle class level. However, nowadays a 'cholo', can rub shoulders with a member of any social class if he/she has enough money.

It is sometimes hard to distinguish a male 'cholo' from a 'white gentleman' if we only go by appearances, but if she is a female the difference between a 'chola' and a 'lady' is much easier to spot. 'Cholas' often dress in a distinctive coloured pleated layered skirt, lace blouse and a shawl; upper class women wear the standard modern western style. Nonetheless, it is very common these days to see the daughters of cholas dressed up in jeans and T-shirts, since many of these girls attend city schools and later go on to university where they mingle with all social groups.

It is important to note that the white social elite has been slowly losing ground, as in all multiracial societies, and over the centuries there has emerged a new biological grouping of mixed background. Thus, Bolivia, like most multi-ethnic societies in the Americas, has come to define race in social terms, rather than in genetic or phenotypic ones (Klein 2003: xii).

All the women involved in this research acknowledged being of 'mixed race'. I asked about their ethnicity because I thought the information could be relevant at some point in the analysis. However, the women themselves laid less importance on this question with responses such as: "I am 'mixed' and does it matter? We are ALL mixed". At least four of them mentioned having had a 'chola' grandmother, one said that she knew her ancestors were from an aborigine tribe in Chile, more than one had a parent from a different Latin American country and all of them had a Spanish surname. Maybe race and ethnicity¹³ are blurred concepts in

¹³ Here ethnicity is understood as "the social group a person belongs to, and either identifies with or is identified with by others, as a result of a mix of cultural and other factors including language, diet, religion, ancestry, and physical features traditionally associated with race". Race in turn is "the group a person belongs to as a result of a mix of physical features such as skin colour and hair texture, which reflect ancestry and geographical origins, as identified by others or, increasingly, as self-identified". Increasingly in daily talk ethnicity and race are terms used as synonyms. Bhopal, R. (2004). "Glossary of terms relating to ethnicity and race: for reflection and debate." *Journal of epidemiology and community health* 58(6): 441-445.

modern Bolivia, however there are other concepts like ‘machismo’ whose meaning is still linked to obvious practices and forms of behaviour.

‘Machismo’¹⁴, the rooted idea that men are superior to women, is subconsciously ever-present at all levels of current Bolivian society (Galvan 2011). Therefore, regardless of the social position of the woman, she will always feel in the shadow of the men from her own social group. However, this will not prevent a woman from the upper classes from feeling superior to men from a lower class. Machismo ideology manifests itself in subtly different ways, according to the social class. For instance, much more physical domestic violence is recorded among ‘cholos’ than in the upper classes.

Machismo is a concept that at some point or another was mentioned by the women during the interview process. Although, some of the opinions were contradictory, many of them agreed that is a phenomenon which is present both offline and online.

There is no doubt that the family structure is the centre of the social life regardless of class. Families are very tightly knit and many generations still live together in one house. The extended family serves as a strong support and network system. Roles within the family are very traditional. The female members are generally responsible for domestic duties whereas men are usually the main breadwinners. I mention the importance of family here because it has proved to be a key concept in understanding the way women experience the Internet.

As Hernández Muriel explains in her study about female labour market conditions in urban Bolivia, the traditional female responsibilities in the home are the most important factors that restrict women to certain occupations and prevent them

¹⁴ Machismo is a term related to patriarchy. Machismo is an attitude and a type of behavior that is displayed individually and/or collectively, while patriarchy concerns the whole social structure García-Celay, M. L. and M. Nieto (2002) *El patriarcado: una estructura invisible*.

While machismo may exist in other societies, the “fully developed syndrome occurs only in Latin America” Stevens, E. P. and A. Pescatello (1973). Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo in Latin America, University of Pittsburgh Press.

from attaining higher earnings. As she states, “different stereotypes and innate abilities between women and men seem to explain to a large extent an occupational segregation scheme and labour income gaps by gender” (Hernández Muriel 2005: 1).

Upper and middle class households usually have domestic service. Women from the lower classes, girls and young women from rural areas, come to work as servants for ‘the ladies’ in the cities. Depending on their luck, some of them will be exploited and abused while others will get training, go to school and learn skills useful for their future (Sanabria 2001). In contrast, middle class girls have a safer and more secure upbringing. Most of them finish school and go on to university, although not all of them subsequently enter the labour market due to the pressure to conform to traditional family roles. The women involved in this research are exceptions; they all labelled themselves as middle class, especially referring to their income and type of education, and they were all highly educated and working actively on their career despite half of them also being wives and mothers.

Historically Bolivian society has had very rigid class system, and it is only in the last few decades that there has been evidence of social mobility. The last few years have seen rapid change at all levels, and the social, political, economic, ideological and technological dimensions are constantly affecting each other.

Evo Morales Ayma came to power in 2005 representing the popular desire to improve the lives of the oppressed and the discriminated, the majority of the people. His presidency has initiated the shift from the previous neoliberal system to a more socialist one; new laws regarding ‘hot’ issues such as racism, gender equality, access to property and technology have been approved. The first major change was to ‘rebirth’ the country through a new constitution that acknowledges for the first time the diversity of the country. Bolivia is no longer a Republic, but rather a “Plurinational State” whose diverse cultures and nations co-exist in a single unique territory.

President Morales Ayma is leading gender parity at the highest levels of government. In 2012 women accounted for half of Bolivia's Cabinet of Ministers, 10 out of 20, and they came from all social classes which generated a lot of debate about their actual capacity and power.

It is too early to evaluate the eventual results of all these political measures but up till now they have only generated scepticism. Even if Bolivians are used to public demonstrations this time the social rumblings indicate unresolved tensions. As a matter of fact, Albó (2008) argues that Bolivia is permanently feeling the effects of four social tensions: the first is between ethnic identities and a unifying national identity; the second is between ethnicity and class, the third is the rural-urban tension; and the fourth, the distinct regionalisms. Apart from these tensions "the growing impact of globalization, which among other things reflects itself in international and intercontinental migration, is generating new ties and identities" (Albó 2008: 34). These cultural tensions, plus the high level of economic inequality or the marked difference between rich and poor, produces an environment of tangible violence and criminality (and whose explanation is firmly rooted in history).

In a wider context, we can look back and see the birth of Latin-American cities as the "product of the Spanish city in America which in turn is the result of a horrific act of violence" (Pastén 2005: 5). After the colonial period which lasted about three centuries, the new ruling elites wanted to be "modern" and imported all kind of services and technologies from North America and Europe, as well as the North American urban model. So, nowadays we find in the urban areas "the well-built, European looking homes and buildings of the rich, the haphazard shantytowns of impecunious immigrants from abroad and peasants and miners who began to abandon the countryside; and the myriads of collective middle class housing that emerged in the fifties and sixties" (Pastén 2005: 6). That was also the period when many countries in the region lived under military dictatorships and for obvious reasons terror was part of everyday life at all levels of societies. When in most Latin American countries democracy took over from dictatorship

and the people thought that a period of well-being would follow, the state and the institutions revealed themselves as being too weak to face the enormity of societal demands. Consequently violence and crime gradually acquired alarming dimensions in many of these countries, including Bolivia.

Depicting the historical evolution of urban settlement is not a 'contextual coincidence' but a necessary step towards understanding certain use and activities of the women on the Internet and important attitudes and emotions towards it.

2.2.2 EDUCATION

It is important to give an overview of the Bolivian educational system since chapter six deals with the women's appreciation of the relationship between the Internet and education. Therefore, a description of the educational system is useful at this stage. The school system is divided into primary and secondary levels, each one lasting six years. Then students go on to higher vocational studies or university. Primary education is compulsory for all children up to 13 years old. Secondary education is usually finished when the student is 17 or 18 years old and after that he/she is admitted to higher education institutions, such as vocational training (medium and superior technical knowledge) and undergraduate and postgraduate universities studies (Psacharopoulos, Arieira et al. 1997). In general most universities only offer courses up to a master level and very few have PhD studies in their curriculum.

The option to choose between public and private education is present at all levels of schooling in Bolivia. One of the reasons why private schools and universities exist is the high demographic of children and youth people in the country and the inability of most public institutions to provide quality education as a result of poor human and material resources (Psacharopoulos, Arieira et al. 1997). But private education also has an historical justification. The 70s and 80s saw great political turmoil due to the succession of military dictatorships and public institutions were often closed down by the government for long periods. At that

time private universities were almost nonexistent so it could take many years before a student graduated. When the neoliberal governments came to power and privatization became the most important concept at all policy levels, private universities started to flourish nationwide. In spite of this, however, in general public universities compare well with private universities; but the situation is different when speaking about schools. Private primary and secondary schools are better in comparison to public ones, which society sees as deficient mainly due to the lack of material resources and poor teacher training and performance.

Two thirds of the women involved in this research attended a private school, and this confirms their “middle class” status; the family economy could afford to pay for this type of education. However, the situation reverses when talking about higher education; more than half attended public universities. So, not all of them attended the same type of educational institution throughout their studies.

The educational system in Bolivia has undergone several reforms throughout the 20th century, all of which have had the aim of making education more democratic, more accessible and of better quality (taking into account the relatively few resources a poor country can invest in education). The Bolivian constitution of 2009 stated that education should now be inclusive, equal, intracultural, intercultural, multilingual and participative. Before 2009, the motto was that education was universal, free in all public establishments and obligatory at primary level. No matter if education in Bolivia is private or public, the fact is that in general terms and in relation to international standards its quality is very low. For instance “Bolivian universities are not represented in the world rankings and their position in ‘Ibero American and Latin American’ classification is low, where the best ranked Bolivian institution is in the position 243” (Villarroel Mareno and Santander Ergueta 2012, my translation).

The middle and upper classes usually attend private universities not only in search of a better education but also as a matter ‘status’ in the “symbolic search to keep and reproduce social distances” (Sánchez, Murillo et al. 2004: 25). The

ratio of male to female students who enroll at public or private educational institutions is affected more by economic means and desire for status rather than gender difference. By the year 2004 women represented 52% of graduate university students in private institutions in comparison to 48% male students (Márquez Tavera 2004). There is no exact data available for public universities, however Rodríguez Ostría and Weise (2006) acknowledge that female students demonstrate more general “efficiency”. Another important factor to keep in mind is that most private university and the smaller public ones focus on inexpensive courses (for the institution) within the administrative, social and legal sciences.

Public higher education has always been political and revolutionary. Indeed, it played a major role in the opposition to the dictatorship and has always supported any grassroots social movement. In this regard public universities have played an historical role in the promotion of gender and class equality (Sánchez, Murillo et al. 2004). However, gender inequality is not only a matter of how many men or women enroll to higher education; inequality can also be present in the hierarchy of the educational institution, in academic practices and in research. For instance, the number of female professors is much lower than that of male professors, although exact data is still unavailable (Ovando-Crespo 2007). The concepts of universality and the participation of women have not affected the patriarchal hierarchical structure in higher education in Bolivia where gender domination and subordination is still present (Sánchez, Murillo et al. 2004: 10).

As already mentioned the women involved in my research studied for their bachelor’s degree in either a public or private university, and, with the exception of three of them, all were teachers at private universities and private and public schools. To be a teacher or a lecturer in a public university is highly demanding and competitive.

The increase in the enrollment of women in higher education is the result of economic, social, political and cultural changes. It has to do with social expectations of a better future thanks to individual economic autonomy and social

mobility. But as Sánchez, Murillo et al. (2004) demonstrate, equal opportunities do not produce equal results. Quantitative indicators do not provide integral explanations about the inequality in higher education. An example is in the female-populated postgraduate courses in the ‘soft sciences’ or the reduced number of female university teachers, which gives ‘knowledge production’ a masculine connotation. Even in the female dominated university courses most teachers are still male. Female participation is not an ‘issue’ in the academic world or a topic of research, reflection or debate. Theoretical production on the matter is almost nonexistent (Sánchez, Murillo et al. 2004: 45). When women attain a position of responsibility and power, it has more to do with institutional and political affiliation and as a consequence tend to forget to promote other women’s interests (ibid.: 48). They are not soldiers for the ‘cause’.

2.2.3 ECONOMY

It is relevant at this point to discuss the Bolivian economy from an historical perspective and how it relates to the current demographic. According to Klein, “despite the rapid changes that have occurred in the contemporary period, Bolivia still remains a poor and relatively backward society” (2003: xiv). By the end of the nineteenth century Bolivia was quite technologically advanced in the mining sector, although all the machinery and technicians were imported. There were almost no native engineers and the situation was similar in other industrial areas. The problem with the development of ‘exact sciences’ was the total lack of infrastructure. Low budgets and part-time teachers prevented the establishment of scientific laboratories or systematic research. Therefore writers, humanists and social scientists developed from the traditional professions of law, theology or even medicine. “Although Bolivians trained and working abroad did participate in the development of modern science in the advanced countries, until the present day Bolivia has remained an importer of science and technology” (Klein 2003: 151), many factors linked to social distribution, education and politics contributed to this technological and industrial underdevelopment.

By the mid-twentieth century there was a major agrarian reform that did not accomplish its goals and which left thousands of peasants and indigenous people in an even worse position. Later on in the century, the decades of authoritarian military regime did little or nothing to stimulate the economy. Then in the 80s the country suffered a severe economic crisis with hyperinflationary periods. The political unrest and the permanent weak state of the economy created a fertile environment for the establishment of a flourishing ‘informal sector’. This involved a new social and productive dynamic borne from in the “growing number of workers excluded from waged labour” (Tassi 2013). Nowadays, these informal merchants mushroom throughout the whole territory and the informal economy supplies the capital city of La Paz with up to 90% of local requirements for food, clothing, transport and electronics (ibid.). The informal economy is more than the activity of small group of traders who work outside the law, it is also a national strategy to help people survive in an environment where up to the 30% of the country’s households lack basic services¹⁵ and almost 50% live below the poverty line¹⁶ (their earnings are less than two American Dollars per day).

The point here is that despite the debatable legality of much of the market system in Bolivia, these informal traders have encouraged the local economy to develop in a way that “neither the state nor the foreign investments would have been able to engender. Their social recognition (relies on) their capacity to generate work opportunities and grant access to products, services and goods of acceptable quality and affordable price” (Tassi 2013). These informal markets are governed by rules and norms defined by dynamics of locality, gender and ethnicity, among other factors. According to the 2012 report from the International Labour Organization (ILO), 75% of the people are informally employed and “about 44% of employment in the top earnings quintile (20%) is informally salaried or self-employed” (Tannuri-Pianto, Pianto et al. 2004). Being female increases the probability of informal work and self-employment because it offers flexible

¹⁵ According to the information available at the Bolivian National Statistics Institute- Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2013) -INE- <http://www.ine.gob.bo/indice/EstadisticaSocial.aspx?codigo=30501>

¹⁶ According to the information available at the Central Intelligence Agency, C.I.A (2013) The World Factbook: Bolivia. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bl.html>

working hours, apart from the fact that even if educational degrees increase the chance of obtaining formal work, this does not signify a determinant for better earnings (ibid.). As a matter of fact, all the women involved in this research work on an ‘autonomous employee’ basis, i.e. their contracts are temporary and they get paid according to the hours worked which may vary according to their contract conditions and type of institution in which they work.

The incorporation of women into the labour market in Bolivia takes place in a context where there are no policies aimed at regulating women’s working hours, no children care and no provision for the elderly (Sunkel and ECLAC 2006: 10). To sum up, even if the country’s economic growth during the presidency of Morales Ayma has been higher than at any other time in the last 30 years due to the state regaining control over its natural gas revenues (Weisbrot, Ray et al. 2010), the informal economy is still “both source of enterprise and cultural formation leading to economic growth in its own right although exposed to risks and endemic uncertainties” (Tassi 2013). This has perpetuated the enormous gap between rich and poor, has nourished all kinds of social tensions, and has encouraged institutionalized crime such as trafficking, smuggling, piracy, tax evasion and corruption.

Describing their contextual background will help us to understand why the women involved in this research approve or avoid certain practices while online. The offline economic situation is clearly mirrored on the Internet and its online economic possibilities. But describing the society, education and economy is not enough for an analysis of the Internet experience; the current state of Internet technology in the country must also be taken into account. This topic will be developed in the following section. A brief historical overview of the Internet in Bolivia will be presented, plus a description of its current state and the future challenges to overcoming the digital divide.

2.3 THE INTERNET TECHNOLOGY IN BOLIVIA

Internet technology arrived in Bolivia in the early 90s. In 1990, the country code top-level domain (ccTLD) “.bo” was registered¹⁷. In 1991 BoLNET (Bolivia Data Network) established a 24-hour Internet connection with 91 countries, after the conclusion of a trial period (Miranda 2012). At the beginning modem connections were limited and very costly; they were first hosted and set up in public universities in the major cities. In 1993 e-mail was one of the first services offered. In 1995 Internet use expanded to web pages and nets, and in 1996 Internet service was first commercialized. Between 1994 and 1999 IRC (Internet Relay Chat) was one of the most used Internet functions; after that, forums and web pages became popular (Miranda 2012; Milenio Fundación 2013). Dial up connections were very popular initially and are still used now. Broadband connection, or ADSL (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line), was only available in 2000 from the main telephone cooperatives in the country but its use is still not extensive as it is expensive and coverage is limited due to lack of infrastructure. To overcome this limitation mobile phone companies started to offer wireless connection through 3G USB, WiFi, WiMax and Satellite technology. As a consequence, the market is growing and it offers good revenues to the service-provider companies. Mobile Internet access is expected to expand due to the enormous number of smartphones that the population owns and uses extensively (LaRazón 2013).

Technology in general has been an important tool in achieving the United Nations Millennium Goals in Bolivia. Therefore there have been, especially in the last few years, incentives and policies aimed at expanding Internet use in the whole territory. In Bolivia there are around 1.5 million Internet connections which provide Internet service to an estimated 3 million people, signifying that Internet penetration had reached 30% of the population¹⁸ by the year 2012. This

¹⁷ According to the information available at: <https://www.nic.bo/historia.php> (Network Information Center - Bolivia).

¹⁸ <http://www.Internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

percentage is quite low if compared with other countries in the region, but the growth of Internet use continues to be rapid and constant. What is interesting to notice is that there are more Facebook users (almost 1.8 million) than Internet connections, according to the Telecommunication Regulatory Authority in Bolivia, (ATT).¹⁹ The number of social networks users has grown, with the medium becoming very popular since 2008. This year also saw the start of 'BarCamps' or off-line community meetings looking to improve Internet technology development in the country. These gatherings are a reflection of the Bolivian online communities which are continuously diversifying and getting stronger. Many of them deploy serious activism with the aim of making Internet accessible to all, at a good price, and with better service (Milenio Fundación 2013).

Country	Population (2012 Estim)	Internet users (June 2012)	% Population (Penetration)	Facebook users (Sept. 2012)	Use Growth (between 2000- 2009)
BOLIVIA	10,290,003	3,087,000	30 %	1,765,820	733.3 %

Sources: <http://www.Internetworldstats.com/stats.htm> and <http://att.gob.bo/>

These BarCamps groups have been a key element in raising the profile of the subject and have been lobbying for Internet services for the public. Their leaders, activists, bloggers, engineers and developers are, in the main, constantly using traditional media as well as social networks and their own blogs and webpages to highlight the problems and limitations of the Internet service provision in Bolivia. For instance, 46% of Internet connections have a speed less than 256 kbps. Internet activists have denounced many private companies for advertising misleading offers, in which a theoretical maximum speed is offered but the actual provision is less; when 4G is promoted the service is just 3G, or even 2G (Oblitas Zamora 2012). Bolivia is a landlocked country and outside of the undersea fibre optic ring system which connects neighbouring seaboard countries and has to pay higher prices to access the service of the main international providers due to these

¹⁹ ATT (Autoridad de Regulación y Fiscalización de Telecomunicaciones y Transporte) <http://att.gob.bo/>

countries selling on the service to Bolivia at increased rates. Internet activist groups and their leaders are struggling to get policies approved by the Bolivian government so that Internet access, understood as a human right to information and communication, is available and affordable to the whole population. Indeed, World Internet Day on May 17th is widely celebrated in most Latin American countries as people recognize the importance of the Internet in spite of it still having limited service or deficient infrastructure.

Official data about the exact number of people connected to the Internet in Bolivia is controversial because the estimates given by governmental, private or even international organizations tend to differ. Most of the time the problem lies in the fact that the number of connections is counted, not the actual number of people using these connections. The latest national census in 2012 could provide one of the most accurate and updated numerical datum so far; however, even there, there can be a strong bias because not everyone was willing to confirm that they connect to the Internet since many connections are pirate or illegal. Internet piracy is becoming a serious problem which the ATT needs to tackle. Internet piracy is present in all geographical areas; in the main cities and in the rural areas. Research undertaken by Villarroel and Gómez (2013) for a leading newspaper outlines the seriousness of the problem and shows how black markets sell all kinds of special antennas and de-codifying devices, and that there are specialized technicians to set up these the pirate systems. There are no specific punishments for this crime because there is no clear legal framework in regard to this. And as Tassi (2013) puts it, for these ‘pirates’, who clearly belong to the informal economy, informality is a matter of perspective. Their trade is illicit and informal only when looked from the perspective of the formal business community and the government.

Internet piracy demonstrates the following: first, that licensed Internet service provision is very expensive and most of the time unavailable; second, that there are no laws regarding the Internet in general, nor about Internet crime specifically; and third, it demonstrates that people need the Internet and

appreciate its importance. Villarroel and Gómez (2013) mention that the need for Bolivians to be in contact with members of their family who have emigrated to other countries is one of the main reasons for the boom in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) use in Bolivia over the last years. The women involved in this research are a living proof of this assertion.

2.3.1 THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Internet access and consumption in terms of percentage of population varies from country to country. Whereas developed countries have high rates of Internet penetration, the rate in Bolivia is significantly less. The imbalance between those who have access and those who do not, or digital divide, is mainly the result of different degrees of social, economic and technical development and policy strategies, which imply differing future opportunities and consequences. Let us now examine how the Bolivian situation compares with the rest of the world in relation to the digital divide.

By the year 2011 Bolivia ranked 98 out of 155 countries in the ICT Development Index (IDI)²⁰ and its index value was 3.13 within the medium value range. At a world level, Bolivia's technological development is poor, but it is not inside the group of the most deficient countries. In the Americas, Bolivia ranks 22nd out of 27 countries taking into account the general IDI, but in relation to the 'ICT Price Basket' or IPB, it is 32nd out of 34 countries. This means that a Bolivian citizen pays much more to access technology than citizens in other Latin American countries, except for those in Cuba and Nicaragua (International Telecommunication Union ITU 2012).

In Bolivia the calculated average Internet speed is 1.2 Mbps; however due to the high costs almost half of users (46.4%) can only afford to pay for a service that

²⁰ IDI is a composite index, with three sub-indices: access, use and skills that combine 11 indicators into one benchmark measure that serves to monitor and compare developments in information and communication technology (ICT) across countries. See: 'Measuring Information Society Report' in International Telecommunication Union, www.itu.int

offers a speed below 256 Kbps. The cost of 1 Mbps is around 55 USD which is the equivalent to half of the minimum salary in the country.²¹

Already at the beginning of this new century, Schumacher and Morahan-Martin stated that “the gap between those with and without computer and/or Internet access has serious consequences. It is creating a new schism: a society of digital and information haves and have-nots” (2001: 96). In this regard, ‘global digital divide’ is the term that has been created to highlight the existing inequity among countries in relation to access, use and knowledge of information and communication technologies, a ‘divide’ that not only separates countries but people inside countries. The digital divide relates to the time when the diffusion of an innovation takes place, the multidimensional nature of the concept of ‘access’ and the imbalance in information availability (Steyaert 2002). “Technology does not create a new social divide but replicates the existing social stratification” (Steyaert 2002: 1). Stern (2010) regards the ‘Internet society’ as being like any other human organization: hierarchical. He points to access and know-how as the two main elements that create different forms of inequality that will be translated in fewer opportunities for the ones who have less. And this is in tune with Castells’ concept (2000) of the “fourth world”, or the social exclusion of anyone in any place due to being marginalized from the Information Age. However, Castells also claims that the unstoppable global diffusion of new information and communication technologies creates “new horizontal communication networks of the digital age” and new forms of “counter-power” (Castells 2007: 258). In this regard, Castells acknowledges the digital divide but is more optimistic about the opportunities of equality and horizontality produced within the network society.

“Access to and proficiency with information and communication technologies are not equally shared among populations within countries or between countries themselves. The unequal allocation of digital resources insures that some countries and populations will find it difficult to compete in the global game of

²¹ According to data available at <http://www.masymejorinternet.org.bo/> and <http://www.netindex.com/>

life” (Stern 2010). For Steyaert (2002) access implies not only the physical means, but also informacy (skill of interaction with new technologies), usage and Information skills. Equal access does not mean equal usage, since some factors that influence the diversity of usage include gender, education and income.

For Milner (2003) the Internet is an example of how the diffusion and adoption of technology works. Diffusion is defined as a process by which some type of innovation “is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (Mahajan and Peterson 1985: 7). An innovation is any kind of “idea, object or practice that is perceived as new by members of the social system” (ibid.).

The adoption of the Internet at a global level is an important process since it not only changes the economy but also institutions and social relationships (Milner 2003: 9). Among the factors that influence the adoption of the Internet, Milner is inclined to ponder a country’s size, geography, culture and linguistic practices. For this author the distribution of the Internet tends to follow that of the existing communication infrastructure. As a matter of fact, telecommunication companies in Bolivia explain that the high cost of Internet provision is because the country is landlocked; countries with direct access to the sea have an advantage in the digital age since international fibre networks lie along the coast beneath the sea. Therefore landlocked countries have to connect to the rest of the world either via satellite or through terrestrial links across neighbouring countries. Due to the poor quality and high cost of fixed broadband, 3G is an attractive alternative in Bolivia; however telecommunication market growth is limited by the country’s high levels of poverty, as well as by insufficient bandwidth for mobile devices. Bolivian users complain of slow and erratic connectivity in the larger cities, where networks suffer from congestion problems (Bibolini 2012). Apart from that entrepreneurs complain of the interminable bureaucratic procedures in obtaining work licences and the limitations of the public infrastructure. Therefore, the factors which Milner (2003) considers as influencing the degree of Internet

adoption in a given country have to be complemented with others; the actual economy, material resources and governmental policies.

According to Schumacher and Morahan-Martin “in the Information Age, computer and Internet skills are becoming increasingly important, and those without these skills are at a disadvantage economically and educationally” (2001: 108) but this is a two-way street; when speaking about the adoption of any innovation, the factors underlying the choice are firmly related to wealth and education; as Milner puts it “given that using the Internet requires that its users have a fairly substantial level of education, we expect that a country’s educational level or human capital will affect the decision to adopt it” (Milner 2003: 11). It is not the aim here to test this affirmation in relation to Bolivia as the present research does not concern itself with quantitative data, nor does it try to make generalizations. This topic is raised here as a point of reference for further analysis as education and culture are integral to a greater whole, and both are greatly influenced by and, in their turn, influence the way people access, adopt, use, consume and transform technology. This evolution is not static either; technological innovations evolve over time, they become mature, more reliable, more user-friendly and more functional (Steyaert 2002: 4). This process, in turn, is directly related to the way population adopts innovation. According to Rogers (1962) adopters of technology, depending on when they decide to start using a new technology, can be labeled as innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards; and this classification can be applied to groups and institutions as well as regions and countries.

Reflecting on how things have changed over the years and making reference to the studies conducted in North America, Schumacher and Morahan-Martin (2001: 98) say the computer was cutting edge technology there in the 1980s and the Internet in the 1990s. When we look at the South, and specifically at Bolivia the situation was similar but with a ten-year time lag as the computer only became widespread in the 90s and the Internet only after the millennium. Going back to Rogers’ classification, Bolivia could then be considered a laggard country due to

its technological characteristics, although some of its citizens were early adopters making use of the first technological service provision in the country. As will be seen in chapter five, most of the women involved in this research can be called early adopters because of the year in which they started using the computer and the Internet.

Throughout this chapter my main concern was to develop in a general way the contextual elements that are relevant for the interpretation of the interview data gathered from the women. Society, education, economy and technology are all to be understood as key factors in the discussion about their Internet experience. Bearing in mind that a contextual presentation can never be exhaustive and that only the most relevant elements were outlined, my goal has been to provide a frame for my interpretation and to highlight the interrelation and relevance of the key aspects in my analysis. These key aspects include: the historical ‘hybridization’ of a plural society in an ever-growing urban environment, the form and quality of education, the informal economy, the fragility of the structure of power, the poor technological conditions, the emergence of the Internet and the global digital divide.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In this chapter I demonstrate the method and techniques that have been chosen to achieve the goal of this research project, which is, to understand how a specific group of women in Bolivia experience the Internet. I also try to reflect on the overall methodological approach, from the epistemological level to data collection and the subsequent data analysis techniques. The following discussion on the choices made is relevant to demonstrate the interrelation and congruence between theory and method that must be clear in any research process. The constant examination of these two dimensions, theory and method, must be a conscious exercise that provides lucidity and clarity to the entire work.

3.1 EPISTEMOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Feminist studies and theories are in general a critique of hegemonic discourses, and also of the epistemology of traditional sciences which sets up the criteria for the production of scientific knowledge (Lykke 2010). For Nina Lykke, feminist studies must always be considered in plural since there is not only a single trend, but many ramifications. It is therefore appropriate to talk about epistemological heterogeneity but with some common shared points on “alternative understandings of objectivity and epistemological implications of embodiment” (Lykke 2010: 142). The way objectivity is understood is a very important paradigmatic change since it critiques the ‘neutral knower’ position of positivist science and reflects on the “localization and contextualization of the knower” (ibid.: 127). This means that the scientist cannot be detached from the historical moment and his/her context which influence the knowledge production practices. According to Moi (2009) well-known authors like Haraway and Harding advocate a perspective-based knowledge, while a new strand of feminist authors discuss objectivity as a result of the process of social consensus.

There are many names and forms of feminist studies but undeniably they all concentrate on much-debated and unresolved topics such as ‘what is a woman’ or ‘what is gender’, to name two of the most important. Empirical studies that address these and other related issues usually focus on making women visible through their “experiences”. Postmodern and poststructuralist feminism argues that it is not possible to talk about the ‘truth’ or ‘authenticity’ of these experiences, but it recognizes that they are *discursively and narratively* constructed (Lykke 2010), therefore “the researcher must, on the basis of his/her analytical perspective, interpret the discursive practices he or she has access to” (Søndergaard 2002: 190).

Lykke is very emphatic when she states that there is not only one Feminist Epistemology but different ways to reflect on the topic. She bases her analysis on the epistemological positions formerly discussed by Harding (1986) which are feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint, post-modern anti-epistemology and adds one more of her own: post-constructionism. She makes a point when she says that these positions are diverse, but they also overlap and share starting points (Lykke 2010: 127).²² The critical, partial and political spirit and, most of the time, multidisciplinary engagement are some of their commonalities.

In this research I stick to the idea of overlapping epistemological principles. Trying to position myself alongside one of them would do more harm than good, indeed it would force me to follow a pre-designed path instead of allowing my research forge one of its own. This approach is supported by the principle in feminist research that approves the explicit involvement of the researcher’s interests and values in the analytical process. It is not to be forgotten that the way one acquires knowledge is inherently culture bound (Lather 1992: 91).

‘Experience’ being a concept at the core of the main research question, the analysis implies a lot of work on the contextualization of the phenomenon but also and mainly on the interpretation of the personal accounts of the women. The

²² For a more detailed and explicit explanation of each of the feminist epistemological strands refer to Lykke (2010) chapters eight and nine.

presentation and interpretation of the women's accounts will therefore follow a methodological 'journey' from different qualitative research perspectives that are expected to result in a sound narrative discourse analysis. At this point, it must be made clear that methodology is understood as the 'philosophical framework' or the "theory behind the method, including the study of what method one should follow and why" (Van Manen 1990: 27-28). Methodology as the discipline that studies the process of knowledge production in specific studies, teaches us that all methodological levels, epistemology, theory, methods and techniques are intrinsically bound together, and that the conscious and coherent choices of the researcher are what gives consistency to his/her work. In this regard, and given the nature of the object of study here - human experience - qualitative approach has been chosen as the methodology to work on the analysis and interpretation of data.

3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research is a field of inquiry and not a "single" method. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) demonstrate how it is used in accordance with a wide range of theories that go from postpositivism to poststructuralism and includes varied research strategies such as case study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and biographical, historical, participatory and clinical approaches. "Qualitative research is not based on a unified theoretical and methodological concept" (Flick 2006: 16), but on certain scientific notions, objectives and rhetoric that are worth reviewing before undertaking a qualitative research activity.

The basic scientific notion is that reality is a social construct and what is being researched is not independent of the research process; so one of the main objectives of qualitative research is to look for an understanding from the actors' perspective and for an interpretative explanation of the phenomena. According to Moreira (2000) qualitative research is persuasive as rhetoric, it has style; it is detailed, and its language is much more colloquial compared to the rational,

objective quantitative paradigm. Hence, the choice of presenting this research in first person was made as a natural consequence of my desire to connect with the reader and present the analysis and findings in a more personal way. Positivist scientific academic writing has strict rules aimed to produce distance and objectivity on the part of the researcher. However the way of presenting a report has profound epistemological connotations. “Avoiding ‘I’ can lead to awkwardness and vagueness, whereas using it can improve style and clarity. Using personal experience, when relevant, can add concreteness and even authority to the writing that might otherwise be vague and impersonal” (UNCWriting Center 2010). The first person style of reporting is becoming more prevalent in the social sciences and humanities and it is almost always the preferred way of expression in women’s studies because it tends to give relevance to subjectivity and individuality; in other words, the private, the emotional and the human differences which are part of the agenda in public discussion (Davies 2012). First person accounts mix well with the partial, situated understanding of objectivity within feminist epistemology, as mentioned previously.

Qualitative research explores feelings, thoughts and experiences in depth and it is dynamic and interactive (Davies 2007: 139). It is relevant to study individuals in their context and their social relations, especially taking into account the plurality of their experiences. In short, according to Denzin and Lincoln “qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (2005: 3). It is interesting to notice how this last assertion adjusts so well to the concept of “situated knowledges” proposed by Haraway where multidimensional subjectivity provides vision and there is no such thing as disengaging subjects and objects; only partial perspective promises an objective vision and critical positioning is objectivity (1988: 583-586).

At this point, I consider it is important to diverge a little and discuss constructivist and realist notions that do not necessarily represent irreconcilable conceptual opposites. Going to the roots of each term, realism understood as a positivist science approach looks for a graspable world while constructivism deals with the

creation of a concept of this world through the human meaning-making activity. All the analytical ramifications produced by these positions over time and history will not be discussed here, it is only worth mentioning that these two originally opposed ontological and fundamental scientific approaches will come to terms when the scientific community understands that while individuals construct interpretations of events, the underlying phenomena do not rely on them for existence (Cupchik 2001: 2). Authors like Cupchik (2001), Barkin (2003), Jackson and Nexon (2004)²³ have analyzed from different angles and fields the much-considered problem of how these incompatible positions can be bridged. “Realist constructivism (or for that matter, a constructivist realism) is epistemologically, methodologically and paradigmatically viable” according to Barkin (2003: 326). I adhere to this idea and argue that social researchers do need to take both perspectives openly into account if their analysis is attempting to depict the phenomenon in its fullness.

Both positivist and constructivist researchers involve themselves in the responsible development of epistemological principles. “The researcher is in-the-world at each stage of a project, shaping it and being shaped by phenomena in it, and by pressures from communities of scholars. ...A reconciliation of positivism and constructivism can only be accomplished by eliminating the arbitrary boundaries and assumptions that separate them. Getting rid of concerns about *truth* and *apprehension* is a good place to start” (Cupchik 2001: 2). An “empathic approach” towards the phenomena where the researcher tries to make sense through the participants’ perspective, would be according to Cupchik, a very fruitful way of applying qualitative methodology. When interviewers and interviewees share reference points it is easier to make meaningful abstractions. If concepts do not account for lived worlds then theories lack in value (Cupchik

²³ While Cupchik reflects on constructivist realism from a social and general research perspective, Barkin and Jackson & Nexon discuss this issue within the field of international relations and the world of politics where the question of power is very much in debate. In fact, the Jackson & Nexon paper is a reply and further elaboration on Barkin’s paper about realist constructivism. According to the latter, power from a realist constructivist analysis is not only instrumental but it is implicated in the construction of social structures as well.

2001: 7). Therefore, trying to work within this empathic approach has been one of the biggest challenges in the present study.

This rather short reflection on realist constructivism states in a general way one of the main onto-epistemological points of departure of this research and, in my opinion it has proven to be beneficial since I chose not to be engaged in single theories. It has also provided the basis for welcoming the creation of different categories of analysis which belong to what could be called the ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ worlds.

Flick (2006) claims that there are three major methodological perspectives in qualitative research: Firstly, the ones related to symbolic interactionism and phenomenology. Secondly, the stream of ethnomethodology and constructionism, and thirdly hermeneutics and structuralism. Different but sometimes shared methods of data collection and interpretation can be found within these perspectives as well as different theoretical assumptions. Flick acknowledges that researchers either subscribe to only one perspective or combine them. This combination, which he calls “triangulation” (2006: 74), is possible because these methodologies share common features; the study of the phenomena from the interior, the interest in single cases, the construction of reality as basis, the reflexivity of the researcher and the use of text as empirical material (2006: 75).

For Flick gender studies, being a “fundamental critique to social science and research”, are more linked to qualitative than quantitative research and respond to many theoretical and methodological proposals. These studies can be found in many disciplines and they can be as Lykke says “multi-, inter-, trans- and postdisciplinary” (2010: 127). However, the main contribution of feminist studies to the social sciences is related to problematizing the object of study and to place the knower and the known in their context, rejecting the possibility of neutral knowledge.

Before concluding this subheading I would like to address two concepts that I consider very relevant to understanding the nature of this research. These

concepts or principles are pragmatism and eclecticism which support the apparently erratic discussion of different theoretical and methodological aspects throughout this dissertation. Both terms can be regarded as research paradigms or macro models with deep philosophical implications.

The main characteristic of pragmatism is that it allows the researcher to feel free of mental and practical constraints imposed by theoretical dichotomies, like the already discussed case of constructivism and realism providing a flexible approach to different methods and techniques (Feilzer 2010: 8). Pragmatism is concerned with using the most appropriate method to find an answer to a particular question or phenomenon. "The acknowledgement of the unpredictable human element forces pragmatic researchers to be flexible and open to the emergence of unexpected data" (Feilzer 2010: 14). And having assumed here that both objective and subjective elements affect the way we experience the world, then different methods of analysis become pertinent to understand its complexity.

If pragmatism advocates searching for the best method or methods, eclecticism allows for the use of different methods without worrying if they come from "contradictory" theoretical assumptions. In this regard, methods can be disengaged from paradigms.²⁴ In other words, researchers should use what suits them best in the context without neglecting theoretical coherence and critical awareness (Yanchar and Williams 2006). Eclecticism regards all possible methods as equals and draws upon several theories and concepts to gain insight into the phenomenon. Thus, all the onto-epistemo-methodological choices developed in the pages that follow and throughout this work adhere to a plural approach in qualitative research.

²⁴ A paradigm is a "worldview" and methods are not necessarily paradigm specific according to Racher, F. E. and S. Robinson (2003). "Are Phenomenology and Postpositivism Strange Bedfellows?" Western Journal of Nursing Research 25(5): 464-481.

3.3 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Before going into the presentation of the methods of data collection and data analysis, let us not forget Van Manen's affirmation that says that "[t]he notion of method is charged with methodological considerations and implications of a particular philosophical or epistemological perspective" (1990: 28).

As stated in the research design, the methods of data collection were in-depth interviews and focus groups. Firstly, two rounds of in-depth interviews were conducted with each of the 19 women making a total number of 38 interviews that were recorded and later fully transcribed. Then, the same procedure was followed in the 5 interviews with the male students from a control group, however the number of questions as well as the time spent in conversation was much less. Finally, after having made a brief systematization of the data from individual interviews, there were focus groups with the women. Now I move on to explain the relevance and value of the interview as a research method and the guidelines I followed when conducting the interviews with my research subjects.

3.3.1 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Interviews are a complex methodology but at the same time a flexible one. One of the advantages of qualitative research interviews is that they allow an understanding of the topics of daily life from the subjects' own perspective (Tanggaard 2009). Depending on the topic, interviews also provide a time perspective enabling a shift among past, present and future. For this research there was an interview guide²⁵, but this was not strictly followed. The topics remained constant, but the questions could vary since a conversational style of interview was preferred. I followed Fraser's (2004) suggestion that advocates that narrative interviewing should take place in a climate of trust, open to different communication styles and where the researcher and interviewee enter in a dialogue that is more "interviewee-oriented" rather than "instrument-oriented"

²⁵ A full transcription and translation of the interview guides can be found in Appendix one, p. 323.

(2004: 185). There are no correct questions or incorrect answers as it is more important to concentrate on the overall logic of the narrative due to the fact that interviewees can be repetitive, overlapping and many times even chaotic. In this type of dialogue the researcher is also at liberty to share his/her interpretations with the interlocutor, producing such detailed material that it is usually applicable only in studies where participants are less than fifty in number (2004: 186). Therefore the interview constitutes a tool that could provide enough material to develop theories from it, or to contest well-established theories (Fraser 2004).

A very important factor when conducting interviews is not only the expertise of the researcher but also his/her knowledge of the context since the relationship between the interviewer and the participant is what provides meaning to the situation (Cohler 2001). In this regard I was a privileged researcher conducting interviews in an environment totally familiar to me. Cohler suggests however that presenting extracts of the interviews in the final paper is the best way for the reader to evaluate the researcher's interpretation of the narratives (2001: 736), and to consider his/her interpretation. This is the reason why the present dissertation presents quotes and excerpts from the interviews of the women throughout the analysis.

According to Tanggaard (2009) the fact that language is the data production medium in an interview is of major importance because one person's word can represent the voice of many. A social discourse is often present in a single account (2009: 1499). Thus, Tanggaard considers the interview as a "setting for the negotiation of meaning" (2009: 1500). In reading the interview the "truth" sought is not objective, but it is a narrative truth that combines the private and public subjectivities of a specific context with a particular cultural background. "Each actor has many different voices crossing, delimiting, or refusing to interact with one another" (ibid.: 1501). Personal stories are always intertwined with those of others and therefore the existence of possible conflicts and discourse encounters must be admitted as this provides a fertile environment in which to

know more about a specific phenomenon. In this way, the interview process constitutes a context with which to grasp the social through the personal.

Tanggaard makes an important point when she claims that even though the ideas expressed by the interviewees may seem to be just individual opinion, “they are the local and personal manifestation of socially embedded discourses crossing and touching each other within heteroglot dialogues” (2009: 1509). In qualitative research interview methodology the relationship between interviewer and interviewee and their negotiation of meanings are very important. She also adds that even with a small number of interviews it is possible to explore and identify variations in social discourses since what one says is what others may also say. Furthermore, if it is feasible, it is better to make comparisons through discourse so that the research also has a more general value. “An interview study should not, perhaps, be seen as particularly well suited for obtaining access to *subjective* experiences but rather as a research mode that is *objectively* attuned to investigating and exploring the discourses and narratives through which people live their everyday lives” (Tanggaard 2009: 1513). What these quotations demonstrate is that narratives and discourses are intrinsically intertwined and it would be too narrow an approach to refer to only one without considering the other.

The procedure followed in undertaking the personal interviews with the Bolivian women is presented next. The following steps were inspired by the work of principally three authors: Bagnoli (2004), Fraser (2004) and Tanggaard (2009) who reflect and advise on the best practice on how to conduct interviews in scientific research.

Step one / Preparation

The present study was developed in three distinct time-space stages: 2011- 2012 in Norway where I met all the academic requirements, presented the project and prepared the fieldwork; 2012-2013 in Bolivia, where I undertook the fieldwork, data collection and interview transcription; 2013-2014 in Norway again for the

data analysis and writing of the dissertation. Therefore, the first contact with the first group of female students, or cohort one²⁶, was made when I was still in Norway. The introduction to my research and personal presentation was made via e-mail and shortly afterwards the female students sent their agreement on interview participation. Once I had arrived in Bolivia I met this group in the institutional environment of the university. I met the first student outside the classroom, and she was the one who later and by her own initiative introduced me to all the others. That first encounter gave me the opportunity to set up the time and place for the first round of interviews with each one of them.

Two weeks later I met the second cohort on their first day of classes (since the two cohorts had differing academic year start dates), so I was not only new to them but they were meeting each other for the first time as well. I was introduced to the whole group by the post-graduate course director. There was no advance e-mail contact, so this time the presentation was quite formal. During this meeting I also had the opportunity to set up the future interviews.

Neither the informal nor the more formal setting posed any inconvenience to presenting my research, my objectives and the setting up of future interviews. However this process went faster and smoother with the second group. It is important to point out that given the interest and curiosity my research aroused in the whole group, some of the men still felt a bit uneasy about not being taken into consideration for participation in my research.²⁷

Step two / First interview

Before starting the interviews I explained the nature of my research to my respondents once again and made them sign a consent form. I tried to be sensitive to their stories and emotions during the interview. I was sharing interpretations in order to facilitate feedback. I used the self-portrait technique to start the

²⁶ A more detailed explanation of the research subjects and empirical material is given in point 3.5, p. 71.

²⁷ The whole group understood that my research interest focused on 'women's experience' and although I interviewed five male students to enrich the analysis when relevant the general feeling was that the men were curious to know what the results could have been if I also took them into account.

interview, so the interviewee is not immediately faced with questions to answer, but rather to introduce herself and to encourage her reflect on her own life. In a way, narrative in general has several points in common with therapy and since participation relies on volunteers, the possible reward that interviewees receive for their participation is to learn more about themselves (Bagnoli 2004). In most cases, I felt that the women were really at ease and eager to communicate. The interviews were planned to last about 40 minutes, but in general they would last around an hour or more. Only a couple of women were laconic but I realized afterwards that it was due to their own personalities rather than a lack of interest in the interview itself.

Step three / Interpretation first level

Immediately after the first round of interviews and before starting the transcription I was collating the results and making notes so I could establish important concerns and dimensions of analysis for each one of my interviewees. I produced a summary of the first interview which I would later introduce at the beginning of the second in-depth interview, so the subjects were able to confirm or reject my first general interpretations.

Step four / Second interview

The second interview followed a suggested guideline with topics that were not always directly linked to personal experience, but that often looked for more general opinions on different topics. However, having had a first in-depth interview it was inevitable that the questions and answers in the second interview were linked to the first, and this relationship between the two interviews could aid in the interpretation of both.

Step five / Interpretation second level

Before undertaking the work with the focus groups, the transcription of the interviews had already started and I had some written material that would help me define the topics to be developed in the group work. Some commonalities and

differences among the participants were found and this presented the possibility of confronting them on the principle topics. The focus groups work centred on general statements and social discourse. This process was initiated by presenting them with some statements on which they had to comment.

The process of interpretation in the field can be considered a collective exercise; it was aimed at finding the main concerns and the views shared among the participants and so I confronted the women with their previous statements at the beginning of each round of interviews. I must admit that the preparation of the questionnaires had been, to a certain extent, theoretically informed; however, due to my methodological choices the fieldwork process was more flexible. It provided me with more freedom when collecting data and using it as a starting point for the analysis. Although I cannot claim that I strictly followed the principles of Grounded Theory²⁸, my idea was to build the analysis from the material which the data provided.

Before I explain the importance and my understanding of the focus groups I want to make clear that the holistic process of interpretation only took place when all the data was fully transcribed, other relevant information gathered and the fieldwork process was completed. However, this did not prevent me from contacting some of my interviewees later on through the Internet if I had some doubts about their responses or some information was missing. All those contacted responded immediately, which eased my work considerably and assured me that all information gathered was being presented in accordance to what they, the subjects, had expressed.

3.3.2 FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups or in-depth group interviews have been widely used in many scientific fields since the middle of the last century (Stewart, Rook et al. 2007). This technique is thought to extend the scope of data collection and to create a

²⁸ An explanation about Grounded Theory is presented in the following chapter. Refer to pages 78-79.

discussion between all participants on the given topics. In this research I worked with six groups; five of these were comprised of three women, and one of four. All members attending the focus groups were from the same student cohort, they were not mixed because a friendly, trust-inducing environment was sought. The advantage of these groups was that they were real and not artificially created for the research. The term ‘real’ as used here means that the women had previously belonged to a larger group and they were together around a common interest: the master course they were undertaking.

Inspired by Flick (2006: 190-193), I tried to be more a process mediator and moderator than a director in the group interviews. I started by explaining the topic to be discussed and then tried to encourage all of them to participate in the discussion. In very rare occasions one of them would try to dominate the speaking, so consequently, I always tried to encourage the more reticent ones to talk.

Focus groups work very well as an adjunct to other methods and are highly efficient for data collection since the participants themselves try to balance extreme positions and try to arrive at consensus. In this research, focus group interviews were highly relevant because many of the topics discussed in the individual interviews were also presented in debate during the focus group exercise. In this way, it was possible to see if the personal positions were maintained, reinforced or changed because statements made in the context of a group have their own dynamic. In addition other new topics of a more general and abstract character were also discussed. The advantage of a group discussion is that the individuals are not isolated and the “group becomes a tool for reconstructing individual opinions more appropriately” (Flick 2006: 191). So, it was expected that focus groups in combination with the personal interviews created an arena for data ‘triangulation’ overcoming the limits of a single method and trying to give equal relevance to the findings from both methods.

It is usually claimed that one of the drawbacks of this technique is that only a limited number of questions can be dealt with because of the limited number of participants and time constraints. However, given the reduced number of participants in each group, several themes were discussed and time did not seem to be a constraint since the meetings could last up to three hours. One of the main differences with this method and single interviews is that even if focus groups can be well planned, it is never possible to predict how the discussion will unfold. The usefulness of focus groups is related to the degree of comfort the participants feel when openly discussing the proposed topics. Therefore, it is essential to create a very pleasant and comfortable discussion environment. One of the elements that encouraged a favourable environment was the degree of intimacy between all members of the group. The fact that the women had shared interests and were already friends produced an important bond, and being regular classmates gave the groups natural cohesiveness.

Focus groups can be used at different stages of the data collection process. They can be used in pre-pilot work, in combination with or as an extension of other methods, or used as a method to communicate findings to research subjects while at the same time gaining new insights on earlier findings. In this research the focus groups activity took place after the two rounds of personal interviews. In this way there was time to reflect on the previous individual answers, try to delve more deeply into certain topics and prepare the debate for new ones. The topics proposed did not emphasize first person experience, but rather encourage opinion on wider matters of social relevance. That which is expressed in focus groups very much reflects established social discourse, and this common opinion in interpersonal interaction counts as much as the content discussed.

3.4 METHODS OF DATA INTERPRETATION

Interviews and focus groups were the chosen research tools to inquire about the women's experiences in relation to the Internet. The aim of both methods of data collection in this specific project was to get to know the women's stories through

their narratives and the discourses embedded in them. Therefore, the methods of data interpretation must permit the analysis of this kind of data. Narrative and discourse analyses from specific perspectives and authors were chosen for this purpose.

3.4.1 NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Narrative is, as Connelly and Clandinin (1990: 2) put it, both a phenomenon and a method. Narrative is the name given to the structured quality of experience to be studied, and narrative researchers describe, collect and write narratives of experience. “Human beings both live and tell their stories about their living” (Clandinin 2006: 44). The lived and told stories are a process of meaning creation and not a matter of a detached description of facts. Individuals do not reproduce facts, they interpret them. Moreover, any personal narrative is the result of a dialogue, of the individual relationship with the other that helps the self to define its own identity. Thus this identity is constructed symbolically through interaction with others, through practice and through the telling of life stories (Cohler 2001: 736). Fraser (2004) argued that in the end human culture is the ensemble of stories we tell about ourselves since the personal is always entangled with the social. Put simply, human beings are by their very nature storytellers and that makes it more difficult for a person to engage in argument than to provide a narration: “Argumentation is an acquired skill inculcated through education” (Jameson 2001: 497). Narratives have also the capacity to convey emotions and establish the contextual settings. Narratives do not rely on the concept of authenticity, but more on the concept of believability, as people identify with stories that are believable regardless whether they are authentic or not.

Personal narrative analysis has its own distinct epistemological and methodological principles. This type of analysis is not interested in large populations or large samples, nor concerned with predictions or the establishments of trends; it focuses on the individual and personal. “Narrative approaches are not appropriate for studies of a large number of nameless and

faceless subjects” (Riessman 2005: 6) and that is why the present research is based on the accounts provided only by nineteen women; these nineteen are fully introduced in chapter five. As Maynes, Pierce et al. put it, narrative analysis “gleans insight not only from subjective perceptions about social phenomena and events as revealed through participants’ stories, but more particularly through the narrative forms of experiencing, recalling, and making sense of social action. Subjectivity and narrativity are at the core of the alternative epistemological presumptions associated with personal narrative analysis” (2008: 10). Thus, narrative analysis praises subjectivity but does not deny the social character of the individual self and his/her historicity. Personal narratives are the product of a context, of a particular social, cultural and historical setting. That is why “they can bridge the analytical gap between outside positionalities and interior worlds, between the social and the individual” (Maynes, Pierce et al. 2008: 16). It is recognition of the social self-construction without being reductive to social attributes.

According to Maynes, Pierce et al., dominant social theories and methods are inclined to study individuals through categories (e.g., race, gender, social class and others) locating people “in the 'outside' or social world” (2008: 16) and explaining their agency through clusters of social variables. “Social actors are treated as if they had little or no individual history, no feelings or ambivalences, no self-knowledge, in short, no individuality” (ibid.). Studies starting from personal interviews allow the analysis to go beyond general descriptions. These interviews provide an opportunity to see the complexity of the human condition and to reveal elements that can only be grasped by gaining an understanding of the lived experience of the individual in relation to his/her context.

As a scientific field, narrative inquiry in the 20th century has developed challenging the traditional positivist ways of inquiry. Today, personal storytelling is regarded as a valid means of knowledge production (Fraser 2004). Narrative inquiry highlights the existence of varied individual and social 'truths' promoting understanding between individuals and societies. It can challenge common beliefs

and even theoretical assumptions. Based on the reflections provided by Connelly and Clandinin (1990); (2004) and Clandinin (2006), it is possible to define narrative inquiry as the study of human experience through the told individual and social stories related, where story is the meaningful interpretation of those experiences. Narrative inquiry then is the study of experience expressed as a story. An experience is the fruit of previous experiences leading to new experiences; people are continuously retelling stories of a presently remembered past, ongoing present and anticipated future. In other words, personal narratives are temporal binding (Cohler 2001). An example of this is seen in the analysis of emotions I develop in chapter eight. This analysis is the study of present oriented accounts, but with the nuances of different temporal projections.

Narrative inquiry does not focus only on individual stories, but also on the social, cultural and institutional expressions within which an individual narrative is constructed. This means that people define themselves in a dialogue with others, through the relationship with what they are not. It is a dynamic process where identities are formed through “social contexts and networks of significant others” (Bagnoli 2004: 2). Therefore, stories may be read bearing in mind their intrinsically social nature, allowing the emergence of differences and similarities between individuals, groups and cultures. In this sense, “[t]he narrative framework is an approach sensitive to social complexity” (Bagnoli 2004: 3) since it is concerned with the interplay of history, social environment and life changes factors at any point in the course life (Cohler 2001: 732). Thus, first-person accounts are a way to understand the meanings we make of lived experience and our narrative choice is also a reflection of our positioning of the self in society.

The narrative accounts can have a variety of sources, from letters and diaries to research interviews, pictures, or even accounts emerging from transcripts provided by focus groups (Cohler 2001: 731) and “they have the potential to validate the knowledge of 'ordinary' people, especially 'ordinary' women who are liable to be omitted from many research projects”, according to Fraser (2004: 184). The narrative analysis relies on ‘trustworthiness’ rather than ‘truth’ and the

attention must be paid to both the narrative coherence and the acknowledgment of the existence of a particular relationship between teller and listener as an intrinsic aspect of the narrative (Cohler 2001: 732).

Narrative inquiry allows theory to emerge from the study of evidence (therefore it shares a common principle with grounded theory) but it can also demonstrate that theory itself changes over time as a consequence of social and historical change. It praises personal accounts because local and subjective reflections can be powerful means of depicting social life (Cohler 2001: 733). However, let us not forget that all stories are partial since they only reflect selected events and not all events experienced. And memories can also change along the course of life as a result of “both expected and eruptive life changes, together with social and historical change” (ibid.: 738). So, the study of narratives must be accompanied by an understanding of the context that shapes both the telling and the listening of the story.

The analysis of narratives must be systematic, always making the evidence and the interpretation clear to the reader. The strategies of interpretation must be clearly stated as well as the categories of analysis and their definition (Cohler 2001: 733). Clandinin (2006) claims that during the analysis it is important to situate the narrative in three dimensions: the temporal (continuity), the personal and social (interaction), and place (situation). When speaking about the ‘field work’ and the narrative collection, she speaks about ‘fluidity’; in other words, the need of a continuous negotiation among the participants, the tellers and the listeners, which may produce unavoidable tensions that are part of the research process. This, in turn, is related to the ethical aspects of narrative inquiry and, as Clandinin says, ethics in this context is more than the completion of the required forms for boards of ethics, it is to do with negotiation, respect, mutuality and openness to multiple voices (2006: 52). The last point is particularly interesting in this research, because I, as a researcher, felt very much at ease with my interviewees. I was able to talk to them without restrictions, to discuss matters

openly and, in this way, I was also able to clarify ideas later in the interpretation process.

Therefore, negotiated interpretation of the story (speech/text) between listener and teller (researcher/subject) must be seen as a genuine attempt to overcome the dangerous limitation of some narrative analyses where the meaning is ‘imposed’ by the researcher. That is why two rounds of personal interviews were planned in the present study; in this way it was possible to establish a dialogue and a consensus in the second interview about what had been said during the first. And focus groups were, in turn, another way to clarify opinions on already mentioned topics. Thus, “the interviewee becomes the main author of the text and the interviewer is a co-author who has taken part in a more or less dominating way. In order to guarantee that the interviewee’s voice is heard in the interview text, it is essential that the interviewee feels free to relate her/his lived experience” (Lindseth and Norberg 2004: 148), something which I think has been accomplished in this study.

Here, in this research, much of the analytical path suggested by Lindseth and Norberg (2004) was followed. In their phenomenological hermeneutical view they argue that the best way to analyze interviews is to transcribe them so that the experience is fixed in a text, which in turn will need an interpretation. The interpretation they propose follows a “dialectic movement”, first of all a naïve reading of the whole text in order to get the overall sense (allowing the text to speak), then the structural analysis, which in their case, is the thematic structural analysis where different themes are sought. “A theme is a thread of meaning that penetrates text parts, either all or just a few” (Lindseth and Norberg 2004: 149) and they are not presented as abstractions but as descriptions. Meaning units that are considered independently of the whole text, can be a part of a sentence or a whole paragraph, and then all these units are gathered in sub-themes or themes. Then a comprehensive understanding follows where the main themes are summarized and studied in relation to the research question. Finally, a confrontation has to be done once again with the naïve understanding (this is a

permanent guiding idea) in order to validate the themes. However it is important to remember that there is no “single fundamental truth, the whole truth can never be fully understood” and the search for possible meanings is a continuous process, therefore this is a matter of argumentation where “we use our artistic talents to formulate the naïve understanding, our scientific talents to perform the structural analysis and our critical talents to arrive at a comprehensive understanding” (Lindseth and Norberg 2004: 152) or as Stone-Mediatore (1998: 129) puts it, the text calls for our participation in exploring the meaning; in a continuous and complex process of “re-writing, re-thinking, re-flecting and re-cognizing” (Van Manen 1990: 131).

3.4.2 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

This research places a lot of emphasis on narrative analysis because the personal interviews were intended to gain an insight into individual stories. However, not everything is restricted to the personal level since the questions and the accounts jump from “I” to “they” to “we”, forcing the analysis to go beyond and to relate micro and macro contexts. Therefore, discourses and narratives cannot be separated from each other.

Authors like Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) and Mills (2004) start their books on discourse theory claiming that the term ‘discourse’ has been used in many fields of study and, for this reason its definition corresponds to different perspectives and sometimes it has even been left undefined. Discourse can be conceptualized as belonging to the domain of communication since meaning is its product. Basically, ‘discourse’ is a written or oral text that differentiates itself from ‘narrative’ because it lacks the chronology of real time that turns the text into a story. The preliminary definition that Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) provided about discourse says that it is a “particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)”.

Discourse and discourse analysis has sometimes risen a lot of debate because of the different meanings assigned to these terms. A discourse can have many “subtle ramifications behind its apparent simplicity” (Potter, Wetherell et al. 1990: 206). According to Mills (2004), discourse can be understood in different ways in relation to specific theorists and theories, but many of these have been influenced by Foucault’s work, who places discourse within the “general domain of statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements” (Foucault 2002: 90). For him, a statement is a “function of existence that properly belongs to signs and on the basis of which one may then decide, through analysis or intuition, whether or not they ‘make sense’, according to what rule they follow one another or are juxtaposed, of what they are the sign, and what sort of act is carried out by their formulation (oral or written)” (Foucault 2002: 97).

Mills (2004) refers to the importance of Foucault’s influence in the field of discourse analysis, although she acknowledges the work of many other authors. She claims that it is important to understand not only the definition of discourse but the context in which the term is being used, and she specifies three contexts or broad fields of study: cultural theory, linguistics and social psychology/critical linguistics (Mills 2004: 8). This confirms what Jørgensen and Phillips state about discourse analysis, calling it a “series of interdisciplinary approaches that can be used to explore many different social domains in many different types of studies” (2002: 1). However they focus their explanations on the types of discourse analysis that can be found within the umbrella of social constructionism. Like Mills, they mention discursive social psychology making it clear that this field of study is not interested in “society’s large-scale discourses”, nor in “internal psychological conditions”, but in exploring “the ways in which people’s selves, thoughts and emotions are formed and transformed through social interaction and to cast light on the role of these processes in social and cultural reproduction and change” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 7). Thus discursive social psychology understands individuals as both products and producers of discourse, and it is

very much “concerned to integrate questions raised by poststructuralist theory and more broadly sociological analysis with a methodology which is rigorous and replicable” (Mills 2004: 143).

Categorizations of everyday life in this field are the result of historical and cultural understandings, and therefore they are essentially contingent. However, “the idea that our lived reality is constituted discursively does not mean that discursive psychology argues that social phenomena do not have material aspects, or that there does not exist a physical reality outside discourse” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 103). In other words, this field is very much in consonance with a realist constructivist episteme and very much in consonance with the theoretical paradigms proposed in this research since social discursive psychology “draws on the poststructuralist understanding of the self as a discursive subject but only in modified form since it also subscribes to the interactionist position that people use discourses actively as resources and consequently stresses that people are producers as well as products of discourses” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 104).

Discourse analysis is a critical inquiry of language use aimed at uncovering how society influences human behaviour and thoughts. Hence, it is a systematic explanation of the text structure through theoretically based categories that represent themes, ideas, views and roles which belong to shared social constructions. But discourse is not an object construction in the abstract, discourse is anchored in a context, it is a situated language use. That is why Potter, Wetherell et al. use the term “interpretative repertoires” interchangeably with the term discourse which they understand as an “abstraction from the practices in context” (1990: 209).

Discourse analysis is not a fixed method. As already mentioned, it depends on the discipline and theory the researcher works with and the objectives of the specific analysis. Linguistics and social psychology often use thematic analysis, within which, a careful transcription of the text is done first (there is an established set of rules and codes for this type of transcription); then, an examination of the text is

performed to identify recurring abstract themes. It is a process in which the researcher identifies themes, sub-themes, categories and attributes of the main concepts. This analytical process concludes with a report that must be informed by the notion of ‘reflexivity’, that is to say the presentation of the author’s own critique about his/her interpretations.

At this point and after having explained my understanding of the data analysis methods, I hope the combination of narrative and discourse analysis sounds more logical than bizarre, as it could always be argued that they belong to different epistemological and theoretical positions. However, let us not forget that “through lived *discourses* we participate in this world, and through *narratives* we become aware of this participation. *Narratives* touch us and move us when they shed light on our lived experience of *discourse* participation” (Lindseth and Norberg 2004: 148).

As a matter of fact, Ussher (1999) declares being struck by the similarities of both methods, narrative and discourse analysis, that share the aim of conducting in-depth and sensitive readings of the subjective accounts of women. According to her, the “integration or cross-fertilization” of these two methods can produce “fruitful insight at both a theoretical and methodological level for feminist researchers working in a number of different spheres” (Ussher 1999: 42), something that is hoped to be one of the achievements of this research.

3.5 THE EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

The subjects interviewed for this research were nineteen Bolivian women who were undertaking a postgraduate course in the field of Education and Technology. They were all professionals and many of them were engaged in education related activities. Seventeen of them had teaching experience, eleven at university level and the others at primary and secondary or higher education level, their ages ranged from 25 to 50 years old. As they represented the total number of female students on the master course there was no need for sampling. In this way the whole ‘population’ participated in my research and on a voluntary basis.

The postgraduate course they were attending was mixed gender; there was a similar proportion number of men and women enrolled on it. The course was divided in two cohorts; the first one started lessons in April 2012 and the second one in August the same year. The first cohort had 10 female students and the second 9 female students so, the total number was 19. All of the female students participated in the individual interviews and focus groups that took place during my fieldwork in Cochabamba, Bolivia in the second half of 2012.

Once I had conducted two rounds of individual in-depth interviews, I moved on to working with the focus groups comprised of three to four women. During this process one of the women had to travel abroad for an extended period, but this did not prevent her from participating in the focus group. A video conference on Skype was set up at the university so she could interact with her classmates who were physically present in the classroom. No technical problem hindered the communication and the process was fluid and comfortable. The reason for conducting two interviews with each woman was to double-check their opinions and therefore 'validate' the interpretation. A second encounter or round gives the opportunity to get participant feedback, which is the main strategy for this type of validity (Johnson 1997).

It is very important to acknowledge my influence as a researcher/interviewer on the subjects' participation in this study. I consider that as I am Bolivian myself and have similar characteristics to my informants, an environment of trust was immediately established wherein curiosity and willingness to participate was foremost in the respondents. After all, I was a woman of almost the same average age, had also worked at different universities, and we had interests in common as well as the same educational background. Although, I did not know them personally; their faces were somewhat familiar to me as it was probable that we had unknowingly crossed paths many times in the places which I frequented. I learnt that three of them had attended the same school that I had; a couple of them had studied the same degree course that I had at the same university; and another two were casual acquaintances as we had a mutual interest in dance and art.

At no point did I think that my familiarity with my interviewees could pose a problem to the research; in fact it proved to be very beneficial in the process of data collection especially. Bolivian society in general is quite closed to the unfamiliar but very open to what is familiar and which inspires trust. The important thing to take into account is that I was very conscious and reflexive about my position as a researcher. I must also recognize that I had a lot of support from the university that the interviewees were attending. Having been informed about my research, the Dean had signed a letter that gave me access to any institutional support I needed. In fact the first contact with the students was possible through the mediation of the Director of Postgraduate Studies.

Most of the interviews were conducted in the university, but sometimes in public spaces and private homes. As they were in-depth interviews some prior preparation and scheduling was needed, since an interview could sometimes take up to two hours.

Even though from the beginning my interest was to inquire about the women's experiences, I did not disregard the possibility of also interviewing men. I therefore decided to interview some of the male classmates of the women. They were five in total and I regarded them as 'control group'. However, the term 'control group' here is not understood as in experimental research where similarities or differences are sought after exposing all groups to certain variables. Here, the term refers to men's participation in order to provide referential and interpretative elements that could enrich my understanding of the women's viewpoints, thoughts and statements. All five male students also offered themselves as volunteers; I could have interviewed more if I wished, but as I had no intention to undertake a comparative study, I considered that the reduced number of male students was sufficient.

Since participation in this research was on a voluntary basis, all the students signed a consent form approved by the NSD (Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste / Norwegian Social Science Data Services). This form stated that

their participation was voluntary, that they had been informed about the characteristics of the research, that their data was going to be treated within a framework of anonymity and confidentiality, and that they were authorizing the anonymous use of their quotations.

Therefore, the data to be analysed in this research is gathered from the transcription of thirty eight interviews conducted with nineteen women (two interviews per person); the transcription of interviews with six focus groups in which the same nineteen women participated; and the transcription of five control interviews conducted with five men. The interview transcription process was started while I was still in Bolivia and was completed when I was in Norway (for the last phase of my PhD). All the interviews were fully transcribed in Spanish, the original language; I only translated into English the quotations and extracts used in this dissertation. The veracity and accuracy of the translation is verified by the revision undertaken by my co-supervisor, who is a native speaker of Spanish.

The transcription of the personal interviews produced around 400 pages of written material and 150 pages for those of the focus groups. The nineteen women were part of two groups, or cohorts, on the same master course; there were ten women in group A, and there were nine women in group B. As for the men, three were in to group A, and the other two to group B. The cohort division was established by the course authorities in accordance to their regulations and did not relate to any intentional grouping on my part. However, this group division was useful in organizing the material and offered some data of quantitative value; but it did not affect or alter the analysis whatsoever, since my interest lay in the individual accounts and/or the group accounts of the men or women.

In Appendix one (p. 323) there is a full transcription and translation of the questions that guided the two rounds of semi-structured interviews with the individuals and focus groups. The topics covered in the first round of personal interviews vary from personal history about computer access and Internet, online

activities, Internet skills and general perceptions of the aspects that motivate or hinder Internet use. In the second round of personal interviews, further general topics were selected for discussion such as family, education, gender, and other elements that could be related to Internet use. All these topics were linked to the ideas discussed during the first round of interviews. Finally, for the group interviews, some of the previous topics were considered again, although new topics that were inspired by the results of the personal interviews were introduced. Group interviews dealt with aspects of cultural identity, online habits, social media, online inequality, gender relations and ICTs, education and empowerment.

The questions and topics for the personal and group interviews were selected in order to explore the women's personal Internet experience but at the same time to see how the women related and perceived the Internet situation to their own context. I must acknowledge that I had prepared some questions for the first round of interviews that were inspired by Intersectionality theory. I decided to ask about categories like class and race, which immediately proved to be irrelevant and which I disregarded in the final analysis. Therefore, following the narrative logic, I was more interested in asking questions that lead to answers with personal content and from which I could develop general topics (the steps taken in order to conduct the interviews are outlined in point 3.3.1).

The interview data analysis is developed from chapter five onwards, and in chapter four there is a presentation of the main theoretical paths of reflection which guide this analysis. The main concern lies in presenting a sound epistemological base from which to build interrelated theoretical concepts. The bringing together of these theories will be the referential point and the compass for the exploration of the different topics, and will also provide a frame of understanding for the complex notion of 'experience'.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 INSPIRATIONAL THEORETICAL STRANDS

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the main paradigmatic and theoretical strands that sustain the analysis of the empirical data. Theory and method, although being the constitutive parts of different levels of analysis, become one within the overall methodology that frames the research. Thus, the reflections here are linked to the ideas discussed in the previous chapter.

The main theoretical perspectives or paradigms that inspire the underlying philosophy in this research are presented next. Phenomenological ideas are the ones which have the principal influence on my understanding and the analysis in this research. Therefore, my theoretical emphasis is on the matching of this philosophy with varied thoughts within feminist studies. I purposely mention feminist studies in plural because I do not adhere to a single theory or epistemology. Further on in the analysis I may very well make use of different notions and concepts within the ‘feminist field’, and I do not seem to be alone in this approach since many ‘third wave feminism’²⁹ authors tend to “wed” different theories and epistemologies (Mann and Huffman 2005). Taking into account Denzin and Lincoln’s affirmation that we are living in a “new age where messy, uncertain, multi-voiced texts, cultural criticism, and new experimental works are becoming more common, as well as more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis and intertextual representation” (2005: 15), the challenge here is to sail the phenomenological ship through the varied waters of the feminist ocean.

²⁹ More about the historical feminist waves can be read at Mann, S. A. and D. J. Huffman (2005). "The Decentering of Second Wave Feminism and the Rise of the Third Wave." *Science & Society* 69(1): 56-91.

Therefore, the main elements of phenomenology and feminist studies are now presented, followed by a discussion on how the concept of experience can be understood phenomenologically without contradicting poststructuralist positions that have been very influential within some lines of feminist theorization.

4.1.1 PHENOMENOLOGY

Phenomenology is a philosophy, a theory and a research method, a wide field without a single, coherent approach. The leading phenomenological theorists share similarities in thinking, but as Greiffenhagen and Sharrock state “they are clearly not part of a unified project” (2008: 76). The principal concern of current phenomenologists is to reveal the embodied, experiential meaning. They use rich descriptions of a phenomenon in context and as it is lived; in other words, they interpret while depicting. The research is basically inductive; it deals with descriptions, interpretations and intentional relationships, and tries to disclose ‘essences’. The essence is the consciousness and the perception of the human world. Essence here is not a synonym of truth. “Looking for the world’s essence is not looking for what it is as an idea once it has been reduced to a theme of discourse; it is looking for what it is as a fact for us, before any thematization” (Merleau-Ponty 2002: xvii). In this sense, my understanding of ‘essence’ is being aware of the experience in the very same moment in which it is being experienced; existence and meaning are lived simultaneously.

Even if phenomenology gives subjectivity a privileged position, it does not mean it rejects the existing objective social structures. Greiffenhagen and Sharrock (2008) understand that phenomenology has been accused by social theorists of emphasizing solely subjective interpretations. However, phenomenology does not subscribe to the dichotomy objective-subjective because it does not study one to detriment of the other. In other words, the ‘object-in-experience’ is a unit that accounts for the acknowledgement of the objective world being part of our subjectivity with all that it entails; perception, consciousness, intuition, intentionality, historicity. This understanding is crucial in my research for it is

coherent with what has been discussed previously about qualitative research and the constructivist-realism as onto-epistemological principle.³⁰

Through close examination of individual experiences, the meaning of an experience or event is sought and since analysts are interested in the common features of the experience, data from only a few individuals who have experienced the phenomenon might be sufficient to uncover the main elements (Starks and Brown Trinidad 2007). For Finlay (2009) a research is phenomenological when it involves “both rich description of the lifeworld and where the researcher has adopted a special open phenomenological attitude which, at least initially, refrains from importing external frameworks and sets aside judgments about the realness of the phenomenon” (2009: 8). Later, the researcher must identify general themes which form the person’s narrative, i.e., he/she must go beneath the surface of that which is expressed to arrive at sound interpretations of the text.

Many phenomenologists concentrate on the studies of narratives, which cannot be compared to content analysis since the latter one “specifies beforehand what it wants to know from a text... In contrast, phenomenological analysis is discovery oriented. It wants to find out what a certain phenomenon means and how it is experienced” (Van Manen 1990: 29). Interviews are used to explore experiential narrative in phenomenological studies because they try to grasp the meaning of an experience through a dialogical relationship with the interviewee. Thus, the various themes highlighted by the researcher may be understood as the constitutive elements of experience. It would be simplistic, however, to think of themes as conceptual formulations or categorical statements. A theme describes the content of the notion and is always a reduction of a notion (Van Manen 1990: 79-88).

The discovery-oriented analysis is a principle shared by Grounded Theory³¹ which is a general methodology that presents an interesting strategy for

³⁰ See chapter three, pages 51-52.

conducting qualitative research. It basically proposes to develop theory from empirical evidence or data allowing the later construction of abstract conceptual categories. Thus, theory may be generated or further elaborated and modified if an appropriate theory already exists. It asks for a simultaneous engagement of data collection and data analysis, the creation of codes and categories from the data and not from preconceived hypotheses, and delay of the literature review (Charmaz 1995). The general principles of Grounded Theory are acknowledged in this research. However, as the analysis does not follow a strict Grounded Theory methodology, I prefer to consider it as a complementary and inspirational source.

In the phenomenological understanding, the person and the world are co-constructed; humans are constructed by the world in which they live and at the same time they are constructing this world from their own experience and background. This is why the term ‘lived experience’ is used in contrast to simply ‘experience’. Lived experience is layered with meanings, and phenomenological description aims to peel away the layers. Human beings are inside and form part of their environment, so subjectivity and objectivity merge in an alliance with the world and our knowledge of it (Racher and Robinson 2003: 465-474).

Multiple interpretations of our world may co-exist, but the work of focusing on the description of a particular experience is to move towards a greater understanding. Knowledge about the world comes through “the subjectivity of

³¹ Grounded Theory can be a useful to study individual processes, interpersonal relationships or even social processes. However, the focus of attention is inclined towards topics such as motivations, personal experiences, emotions, identity, conflict, prejudice and such. As in most qualitative research, *interpretation* is a keyword in grounded theory, but what is actually sought through this methodology is a conceptual density or richness of concept development and relationships. Grounded theory has been adopted by researchers in many fields, such as feminist studies, and also combined with other methodologies like phenomenology. The usual mistake is to consider that any inductive study is grounded theory; to start the analysis from the data does not necessarily mean that one will be able to develop a theory or plausible relationships between concepts or a set of concepts; and even doing that we must still be conscious that our theory is an interpretation and therefore fallible.

Strauss, A. and J. Corbin (1994). "Grounded theory methodology." Handbook of qualitative research: 273-285.

being-in-the-world, embodiment” and “intersubjective experience generates meaning of the social world” (Racher and Robinson 2003: 474).

Interpretation in a phenomenological approach is a conscious and careful process of understanding. To put it simply, phenomenology is not only a science, but also an art. According to Finlay, researcher subjectivity is the part of the research which provides “poetic sensibility to the scientific enterprise” (2009: 14). Science provides the method, the art is in the ability to interpret results.

In phenomenological tradition, hermeneutics is the careful and deliberate interpretation of texts. Any text is open for interpretation since it speaks to us by itself and independently of its author (Littlejohn and Foss 2008: 132). The interpretation process goes from general to specific and vice-versa in what is called the hermeneutic circle. Interpretation and language are indivisible from experience; phenomenology and hermeneutics come together in one process. In this regard, at the level of analytical tools, the boundaries between phenomenology, discourse analysis and grounded theory are porous since interviews and/or focus groups are usually their preferred methods to gather data. The concept of experience is the unit of analysis and, given that a single person can generate a great amount of ideas and meaning, large samples are not necessarily needed (Starks and Brown Trinidad 2007: 1373-1374). “All three interpretive methods distill textual data (down) to a set of categories or concepts from which the final product can be drawn” (ibid.: 1375). Thus, discourse analysis with strong postmodern and poststructural roots has been the preferred research method in many feminist studies.

In the following I present an overview of some of the relevant points within feminist studies that are of interest to this research.

4.1.2 FEMINIST STUDIES

‘Feminism’ is a complex and “troublesome term” (Beasley 1999). It inspires “controversy and even visceral response” (Offen 1988) as it gave birth to as a set

of ideas leading to greater equality for women (Fiss 1994), and which soon turned into a proper field of action and study. It encompasses social movements, political discourses, academic studies, various theories, different methods, and is inter- and multi-disciplinary.

Offen (1988) provides a comprehensive review of the term ‘feminism’ based on her analysis of its development in, mainly, European and American history. She demonstrates that in western culture feminism has often followed different paths and yet has arrived at similar junctures. Even the word feminism was not “used by everyone to mean the same thing” (1988: 128). There are many kinds of feminisms and many possible classifications: ‘new’, ‘old’, ‘radical’, ‘hard’, ‘soft’, ‘anti’, the list is almost endless. So, her point is that regardless what the attitude towards feminism is, it is impossible to eliminate the term from a society’s vocabulary and therefore a definition must be sought to make sense of it and its historical evolution. For Offen, feminism “encompasses both an ideology and a movement for socio-political change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women’s subordination within a given society” (1988: 151). For her, a feminist approach should not only recognize the value of women’s personal interpretation of their “lived experience” but, also show awareness of institutionalized inequality and become an advocate for change.

Feminist studies are concerned with theory and practice, with the analysis of different discourses on power, gender, sex, embodiment, materiality, society, culture and more from the point of view of various disciplines. Lykke (2010) uses the term ‘Feminist studies’ as a “shorthand for Feminist/Gender/Women’s studies”. She recognizes that different names reflect different theoretical considerations and historical periods. Gender studies welcome the study of the female identity and are presented as having deconstructed the man-woman dichotomy. However, some feminist lines of thought regard the label ‘Gender studies’ as problematic because “it essentializes a detachment of gender from sex and embodiment” (Lykke 2010: 12).

As Lykke, I prefer the term Feminist studies because it does not fix a ‘proper’ object, as in the case of Women’s Studies, nor separates gender from sex as in Gender Studies (2010: 12). Feminist Studies is an inclusive term that anchors in different points in time and space and allows me to acknowledge, as my research question does, that I am working with a distinctive kind of human being: women, who are sexed, gendered, living cultural bodies.

Going back to the historical roots of feminism, Mann and Huffman (2005) explain that it has gone through a sequence of periods and/or waves of thought. First wave feminism took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and it focused on social and political actions to overcome inequality. Second wave feminism that flourished in the last decades of the 20th century was concerned about differences, freedom and identity. They argue that the feminism of nowadays is entering the third wave, which is not a uniform perspective, but includes diverse approaches which are generating a new discourse. This discourse is based on theoretical thoughts, mainly from the second wave, and include intersectionality theory, poststructuralism and postcolonial theory, which have been very influential in forming the new feminist agenda. They define discourse as “historically variable ways of specifying knowledge and truth that both constrain and enable writing, speaking and thinking” (Mann and Huffman 2005: 57). Therefore, politically-engaged feminism has used different, mainly, academic theoretical discourses to understand and give visibility to women’s problems.

In chapter three, I mentioned that, although the interpretation process in this research is discovery oriented and not bound to a single specific theory; the preparation of the first round of interviews was inspired by Intersectionality theory. Thus, the questions were grouped by topics or categories assuming that their intersections could prove relevant to understanding the women’s Internet experience. I now present a brief explanation of the characteristics and main principles of Intersectionality theory.

4.1.2.1 INTERSECTIONALITY THEORY

The notion of intersectionality had already been present in sociological circles by the middle of the last century, but it was only in the 1980s that Kimberlé Crenshaw highlighted the concept in feminist studies. Crenshaw (1989) elaborated a critical theory for Black Feminism taking into account ‘race’ and ‘gender’ as major intersecting categories of analysis in opposition to the until then, exclusionary white middle-class perspective. Later on, the category of ‘class’ was also incorporated alongside race and gender to produce the well-known triad of ‘class, gender and race’, and subsequently this theoretical proposal has acquired much popularity, attention and debate. McCall already claimed in 2005 that “intersectionality has seen itself raised to the status of being the most important theoretical contribution to date of feminism” (2005: 1771) and Winker & Degele stated some years later that “intersectionality is on its way to becoming a new paradigm in gender studies” (2011: 51).

Davis (2008) acknowledges that intersectionality has produced “heated debates” especially in the US and Europe and has become an everyday topic in university courses and conferences related to women’s studies. This demonstrates that the concept of intersectionality has not been fixed, static or just applied uncritically, but has been constantly revised and adapted to new theoretical and practical applications. Any scholar who dares neglect the premises that intersectionality provides, according to Davis, risks having his/her work viewed as “misguided, politically irrelevant, or simply fantastical” (2008: 68).

Intersectionality as an abstract concept refers to the crossing point of two or more categories (most of the time understood as dimensions of oppression). However, it is more difficult to specify one common definition when referring to the whole range of feminist studies which takes intersectionality as a theoretical framework. It is used in programmatic policy contexts and in theoretical integrated studies. For Walby, intersectionality is “a relatively new term to describe an old question in theorization of the relationship between different forms of social inequality” (2007: 451). Bilge refers to it as a “transdisciplinary theory aimed at

apprehending the complexity of social identities and inequalities through an integrated approach” (2010: 58) and Davis as “the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (2008: 68).

Sometimes intersectionality is described as a theory in its own right, but at other times just as a concept, an analytical strategy or a methodological approach. On some occasions it is used for understanding individual experiences, and on others to see the relations of the macro structural forces in a society. Intersectionality also addresses a concern of feminist scholarship: the ‘acknowledgment of difference among women’ through the exploration of categories such as gender, race and class. The idea of category intersection makes specialists think of concrete contexts while generalists focus more on the integral picture of feminist issues. Finally, this theory presents each and every case of study as an open question, promoting new discoveries and critical analyses.

The fact that intersectionality allows us to focus on different levels of a phenomenon is, in a way, its strength but also its weakness. Bilge (2010) argues that intersectional analysis on a microsocial level allows us to grasp the unequal effects of structures on individual lives whose intersections produce distinctive configurations. On a macrosocial level, it reveals the ways in which diverse systems of power reproduce inequality. Therefore, intersectional analysis facilitates the study of multiple, co-constituted differences. Thus, in brief, intersectionality provides an analytical tool to understand people’s differentiated experiences in terms of power³², and asks the researcher to focus on certain categories whose unique intersections will provide explanations for these differences.

³² Here ‘power’ is understood as the ability and possibility of doing and being. Power in itself does not have a negative or a positive connotation. When speaking about categories of inequality, even if most studies just focus on oppression (the lack of power), this research considers the categories as arenas of power, where power can be taken, created and transformed.

Despite the apparently simple concept of intersectionality, it is quite complex because real life is dynamic; it refers to processes and intersections that are overlapping, both historically and contextually. The analysis of this complexity is what makes intersectional methodology so demanding. Authors, in part, feel compelled to elaborate their own model of analysis in an attempt to read this complexity, and the proposals are as varied as the number of researchers who work with intersectionality. Lykke (2010: 68) acknowledges three 'clusters' of feminist analysis using intersectionality; the explicit ones that consciously and explicitly use the concept, the implicit ones that “focus on intersections but without using the concept of intersectionality as the main frame of interpretation” and the ones theorizing on intersections under other names.

A challenge in intersectional analysis, according to Yuval-Davis (2006), is to avoid thinking of social divisions as “separate and internally homogeneous”. Social divisions for her take organizational, intersubjective, experiential and representational forms (it is interesting to notice how these terms correlate so well with the phenomenological perspective). What is important to analyse is “how specific positionings and identities and political values are constructed and interrelate and affect each other in particular locations and contexts” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 200) since specific historical moments and specific people call for the revision of specific social divisions.

In a similar path of analysis, Bilge (2010) points out that there is a theoretical conflict in the category differentiation that most authors propose. The question, Bilge claims, is how is it possible to maintain analytical disassociation between categories of difference, when in reality individuals live these categories simultaneously? This produces limits to what intersectionality can explain (2010: 64). Like Yuval-Davis (2006), she also poses the challenge to think of intersectional analysis in terms of context and history to avoid ahistorical descriptions. Bilge ends her reflection saying that it would be appropriate “to treat intersectionality as a meta-principle which requires to be adjusted and rounded out in respect of the particular fields of study and research aims to which

it is applied, and to accept the multiplicity of its usages” (2010: 69). And it is this advice which is being taken into consideration for the analysis of the Bolivian women, for intersectionality is taken more as an inspirational principle rather than a pre-established research guide.

No matter the type intersectional analysis is described as; interlocking, multilevel, multidimensional, dynamic or interconnected, the fact is that each of them builds a model to describe and explain the relationships between different aspects of a given real situation. As intersectionality is truly open for authors to create their own different categories of analysis, I decided to use the principal idea of this theory to elaborate the interview questions, grouping them in categories that dealt with aspects of identity at micro/interpersonal levels. Thus, womanhood, socio-cultural group, life stage, educational background and Internet skills were the topics examined in the first round of interviews. The relevance of these topics and their pertinence to the Internet experience was discussed by the women themselves during the interviews. These categories, which were considered as dimensions wherein possibilities and impossibilities coexist, were established during the elaboration of the interview questions. If categories are thought of only in terms of oppression; they can be considered as imposed "onto" women, and that makes them more of an independent variable rather than individual's own meaning construction.

4.1.2.2 POSTSTRUCTURAL FEMINISM

At the beginning of this chapter I acknowledge that the main theoretical base to this research is phenomenologically oriented; however, I also mention that my interest and my conscious challenge is to try to understand the object under study with the assistance of feminist ideas. Therefore, even if phenomenology and poststructuralism may seem to be irreconcilable opposites, I insist on putting them up for discussion in an attempt to find complementary elements.

While phenomenological and hermeneutical thought had its most influential period at the beginning of the 20th century, poststructuralism as a philosophic

movement began in the 1960s. It was born as a reaction to structuralist ideas that represented secure knowledge. This demonstrates that philosophical movements are not born out of nothing. On the contrary, they are at times a continuation and at others an answer to, or even a question about, previous philosophical reflections. Thus, poststructuralism philosophical roots can be traced back to phenomenological thinkers such as Heidegger and Husserl (Williams 2005: 4). There is an opposition to essentialism, determinism or naturalism in poststructuralist thought; the possibility of different interpretations resists the notion of an absolute truth.

Poststructuralism is part of the critical postmodern project that rejects universalization of meaning determined by structures, conditions and symbols (Littlejohn and Foss 2008). In other words, it is a reaction to positivist principles. Meanings are determined by the “production and interplay of symbols specific to a particular historical moment” (Littlejohn and Foss 2008: 49). There is a substantial overlap between poststructuralist and postmodern thinkers; the first group is more inclined to study knowledge and language; while the second places more emphasis on society, culture and history (Agger 1991: 112). Their methodological focus is on deconstruction. “Language produces meaning only with reference to other meanings against which it takes its own significance” (ibid.: 113). Deconstruction is a set of technical procedures to manipulate data to reveal the values and interests hidden under the surface of science (ibid.: 114).

One of the “most radical claims of poststructuralism is to reject the possibility of arriving at a truth about the essence of a phenomenon” (Søndergaard 2002: 188) and many feminist studies engage with this poststructural principle. They claim that gender is the result of a discursive construct; therefore there is no such thing as a woman’s essence or identity. “Poststructuralist feminists affirm that, while subjects do have ‘agency’ in a weak situated sense, their possibilities for agency are posited only through and thus restricted by the competing discourses that comprise their world” (Huntington 1995: 41). Identities and social categories are the result of discursive processes in specific contexts. Meanings are produced not

through intentionality but rather by the very mechanisms internal to signification within a given language system or set of discursive practices (ibid.).

The use of language is relevant for poststructural feminists because it shows how discourses are gendered and how inequalities are produced. “When we normalize meanings and grammars, we are in fact privileging one form of discourse over another, which is ultimately and always oppressive” (Littlejohn and Foss 2008: 342). Therefore power is another topic of special interest within this line of theoretical thought. Discourses can be contradictory and different according to context, so cultural competence is needed to be able to engage in discourse analysis. This competence is knowing how cultural premises work in different ways to create individual identities and collective legitimacy (Søndergaard 2002: 199).

Poststructural feminists who work with intersectionality analysis regard the “different categorizations as mutually pervading and interpenetrating each other without any possibility of separating them analytically” (Lykke 2010: 73). In other words, the focus is on the processes by which individuals create meaning from the categorizations which frame their everyday lives (ibid.: 74). Mann (2013) argues that even if intersectionality theory and poststructuralism share a “strong social constructionist view of knowledge” and both of them are interested in the “retrieval of subjugated knowledges as critical acts that undermine dominant discourses” (2013: 60), poststructuralism denies the possibility of arriving to ‘the truth’. It rejects categorizations and calls for the deconstruction of any identity category. And since Intersectionality bases its understanding on categorizations, a clear incompatibility between the two theories arises at an epistemological level. This incompatibility makes Mann label the combination of these two theories an “unhappy marriage” despite the points in common. Something similar could be said about the relationship between poststructuralism and phenomenology. Although the first rejects the possibility of arriving at the truth and the second looks for the essential, they both converge on basic concerns about the importance of experience and interpretation and the power of symbols.

As Martis claims, “the two accounts coincide at their descriptions of the juncture at which consciousness seeks to render encounter as experience” (2009: 206).

However, the important point to remember is what Littlejohn and Foss (2008) argue about human theories; they say that different traditions become more or less valuable according to the context. Theories that deal with broad social structures can help to understand the individual, as in the case of poststructuralism and intersectionality, and theories that deal with personal subjectivity contribute to knowing society as a whole, such as phenomenology.

4.1.2.3 POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM

Mann and Huffman (2005) argue that the challenges posed by the intersectionality and poststructural theories pushed the development of feminist postcolonial theory and the agenda of the new feminism. Postcolonial positions demand attention be paid to the “heterogeneity of women in the third world in terms of their multiple and diverse social locations to undermine essentialism” (Mann and Huffman 2005: 67). As a matter of fact, postcolonial feminism is an umbrella term for all the theoretical reflection that challenges western feminism, or most of the work of white North American and European academics. Postcolonial positions criticize the last two for having universalized the conditions of women, overlooking important cultural distinctions.

Postcolonial feminism questions the concept of “development” and its devastating impact upon women in the Third World and insists on “local readings of ‘ordinary women’ in the necessarily global context” through a “rigorously historical and dialectical approach to its objects of study” (Sunder Rajan and Park 2005: 66). Mohanty (1984), a representative of the postcolonial feminism, argues that a sort of “monolithic” Third World definition of women has been constructed in many Western texts produced within Western scholarship. She criticizes three basic analytical principles in this construction. Firstly, the fact that women have become a single group based upon their powerlessness and victimization within a specific socio-economic system, as if all Third World women are victims of male

violence, are not independent, and are attached to familial systems and religious ideologies. All in all, as if they were “women in development” (Mohanty 1984: 343). Secondly, she questions the uncritical use of particular methodologies, like the arithmetical proof of universalism and the use of concepts like family, marriage, patriarchy and others without the analysis of local, cultural and historical contexts. Thirdly, she criticizes the stereotypical model of power and struggle which informs the understanding of Third World women, producing an “homogeneous notion of oppression” (1984: 337) and assuming the existence of a binary structure of power versus powerlessness. All three principles make Third World women appear as a coherent group that, due to the analyzed characteristics³³ is treated with a paternalistic attitude.

Postcolonial Feminism uses difference and deconstruction to present new insights into the feminist thought. According to Mann and Huffman (2005) Mohanty’s critiques are based on postmodern, poststructural and intersectional ideas to deconstruct essentialism. Her demand to recognize women’s heterogeneity is also shared by intersectionality theorists. Therefore, I adhere to the way postcolonial feminism reclaims women’s diversity and agency, as that allows me to construct my analysis from the data provided by an as yet undiscovered group of women who may not correspond to the Third World stereotype.

Many of the postmodern, poststructural, intersectional and postcolonial principles are embraced within what is called ‘Third Wave Feminism’. Third wavers pay more attention to the individual than the society, there is a focus on the personal transformation that can lead to social change, and they believe that there is more to learn from internalized oppression than externalized. For third wavers, mass culture and new technologies are transforming our lives, the marginal is

³³ “Third World women as a group or category are automatically and necessarily defined as: religious (read ‘not progressive’), family-oriented (read ‘traditional’), legal minors (read ‘they-are-still-not-conscious-of-their-rights’), illiterate (read ‘ignorant’), domestic (read ‘backward’) and sometimes revolutionary (read ‘their-country-is-in-a-state-of-war-they-must-fight’).” Mohanty, C. T. (1984). “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses.” boundary 2 12/13(ArticleType: research-article / Issue Title: Vol. 12, no. 3 - Vol. 13, no. 1, On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism / Full publication date: Spring - Autumn, 1984 / Copyright © 1984 Duke University Press): 333-358.

becoming central and the borders of social categories are becoming blurred (Mann and Huffman 2005). This last assertion is relevant to this study since it backs and confirms the value of my subjects of research, the chosen women, and my object of research, the Internet.

4.1.3 POST-PHENOMENOLOGY AND FEMINIST STUDIES

Oksala states that phenomenology can be read from four perspectives: classical, corporeal, intersubjective and, as she defines it, post-phenomenological. If phenomenology is read from the classical point of view, one could say that it is incompatible with gender studies or even feminist studies (Oksala 2006). This is because the constituting principle of phenomenology is to understand subjectivity beyond corporeality. As Oksala says “transcendental subjectivity cannot be understood as sexed, otherwise we would have to argue that there are, in fact, two different types of transcendental subjectivities” (2006: 231). However, the corporeal reading bases its notions on the understanding taken by Merlau-Ponty: a complete reduction of transcendental consciousness is impossible as perception and experience are necessarily embodied. Intersubjectivity is, in its turn, concerned with the shared understanding of language and historicity, and therefore gender is attached to cultural values. The principle of intersubjectivity is concerned with the inter-relationship of the individual with others and the world as a whole.

Related to this corporeal phenomenological reading, Butler (1988) recognized that the famous Simone de Beauvoir phrase “one is not born, but, rather becomes a woman” is an appropriation and reinterpretation of the phenomenological theory of ‘acts’; “...because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all” (1988: 522). The body is always the embodiment of its historical possibilities. However Butler asks herself if phenomenology can help in making sense of women’s oppression when human acts are the point of departure for any understanding. She claims that transforming social relations is the key for transforming hegemonic

social conditions rather than transforming individual acts. Gender is performed, acted. There is no prewritten script guide, nor is one given to us by nature.

For Oksala the post-phenomenological study of gender does not uncover generalizations nor does it get stuck in individual experience, but rather “seeks the structures that are constitutive of the sense of normal in *our* homeworld” (2006: 239). So, in the post-phenomenological reading, Oksala proposes taking the hermeneutical circle to study gender not as “universal and complete, but as an endless, circular and always partial task” (2006: 238). This does not mean that phenomenology is being rejected, on the contrary it is the affirmation of a gendered experience. So, phenomenological reduction would be “the interminable effort to break our familiar acceptance of the world and to see as strange and paradoxical what we normally take for granted” (ibid.: 239). Post-phenomenology therefore abandons the idea of a pure transcendental subjective reduction to accomplish a partial revelation of the ontological schemas underlying our ways of thinking, perceiving and acting. It is important to recognize that these ontological schemas are always tied to cultural normativity (language, history and culture) (Oksala 2006: 240). This does not signify a denial of individual experience and the value of a singular analysis, as the reflection of gender is always ultimately a personal task.

In my understanding, post-phenomenology is an attempt to address the need for a new paradigm in social sciences, one where the old dualisms and dichotomies such as subjective and objective, discourse and reality, are superseded by a new and more comprehensive theoretical settlement (Hekman 2008). I will therefore try to envisage the way in which this ‘new settlement’ can assist me in reconciling the different theoretical positions which are taken on the study of experience.

4.2 UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCE

Since the women's 'experience' is the focus of the main research question, the revision and understanding of the term 'experience' becomes a necessary and relevant task. 'Experience' has been a topic for reflection for many philosophers and scientists throughout human history. The purpose here is not to provide an historical account of all ideas, opinions and positions on 'experience'; but to focus more on current and modern debates, taking into account the phenomenological understanding of experience and the poststructuralist criticism of it. My aim is to present an arena of reconciliation where both epistemes are equally positioned in the analysis of experience.

To enter into the discussion of what 'experience' is, let's start with the ideas proposed by Turner and Bruner (1986) who claim that the study of experience not only refers to the study of how events are received by consciousness, but also to a phenomenon that goes beyond cognition as it also involves feelings and expectations (1986: 4). It is possible to see others' behaviours, but it is not possible to fully know others' experiences. That is why "the communication of experience tends to be self-referential" (1986: 5) and the only way we have to come close to the understanding of others' experiences is through the interpretation of their expressions. Turner and Bruner, based on their study of Dilthey's hermeneutical philosophy, state that the expressions of experience can be representations, performances, objectifications or texts (*ibid.*). Thus, experience is not only language or a general signifying system; "experience pre-exists signification at the same time as signification brings it into meaning" (Lye 1996: para. 5). The complexity of this notion has been the cause of much concern and debate for feminist authors who stand by phenomenological research as well as poststructuralism; their main arguments are presented next.

4.2.1 PHENOMENOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS AND THE NOTION OF EXPERIENCE

A principle of phenomenological hermeneutics says that humans share reality through common signs, through the mediation of our symbolic world. We are continuously interpreting expressions within a context; when we ‘understand’ others, we make their contexts and symbols our own. Humans are language in the sense that they are self-reflective, “we are not beings who ‘use’ symbols, but beings who are constituted by their use” (Lye 1996: para. 4). Experiences are articulable, but not reduced only to articulation; when expressed through language, an experience does not change, it comes into being. However, there is always an excess of meaning that escapes articulation; an experience is never exhausted by its symbolization or, using Turner and Bruner’s term, by its expressions. In phenomenology, “there is always a self-presence before there is signification, and there is always something of our being-in-the world beyond its signification... In the structuralist/deconstruction tradition, the surplus of meaning is in the play of signs, not in the surplus of being” (Lye 1996: para. 6). It is not a matter of what is beyond words, but what is in “being” that cannot be put into words.

Thus, the relationship between experience and its expressions is always problematic and it “is clearly dialogic and dialectical, for experience structures expressions, in that we understand other people and their expressions on the basis of our own experience and self-understanding” (Turner and Bruner 1986: 6). However, expressions structure our experience as well; so our experience is culturally constructed. This experience-expression relation should not be understood as a dilemma. Turner and Bruner make what they call a ‘critical’ distinction between reality (what is really out there, whatever that may be), experience (how that reality presents itself), and expressions (how experience is framed and articulated). So, life as experienced is the experience, but life as told is the expression; and there will always be inevitable gaps between the two (Turner and Bruner 1986: 6).

Experience contains ordinary and extraordinary occurrences, it encompasses meanings and feelings. And if phenomenological research is the study of lived experiences, it concerns itself with the meanings as lived in day-to-day existence. So, it attempts to articulate the embedded structures of meaning through the study of the expressions. In a very handy example for feminist studies, Van Manen claims that “[h]ermeneutical phenomenological research is a search for the fullness of living, for the ways a woman possibly can experience the world as a woman, for what it is to be a woman” (1990: 12). Fisher also highlights a relation between phenomenology and feminism when she claims that both of them place an emphasis on experiential analysis; “phenomenology can provide feminist accounts with the possibility of validating experiential claims through analyses of evidence and givenness, so that such accounts are not only acceptable but *legitimated* in the terms of phenomenological legitimation” (Fisher 2000: 34).

Lindseth and Norberg claim that “for research purposes lived experience has to be fixed in texts, which then always needs interpretation” (2004: 147). These texts are usually narrations where people are not interested in stating facts, but in relating their experiences. Most of the time they are not interested in judging or concluding, and a phenomenological researcher must not judge either, but be aware that “in the telling, both the teller and the listener take part in the narrated meaning” (Lindseth and Norberg 2004: 147). As in any narrative, present experience always takes into account the past and anticipates the future. Both, present and past become a single unit of meaning. People’s expressions are meanings, these expressions shape the world; therefore, people are active agents in the historical process. “Cultural change, cultural continuity, and cultural transmission all occur simultaneously in the experiences and expressions of social life” (Turner and Bruner 1986: 12); they are all interpretive processes by which we discover and assemble the self. Experience registers life through the filter of culture.

Narratives, as forms of expression, do not necessarily reflect the actual experience. They can also be a reproduction of dominant narratives that are not

only units of meaning, but also of power. The way we narrate has a political component. We can make others co-participants in our narration, and we can actually manage to “transcend individual experience through participation in cultural expressions” (Turner and Bruner 1986: 21). This last idea demonstrates once more how discourse and narrative are the two sides of the same coin.

Lived experience, in the sense of immediate awareness, is the beginning and the end of phenomenological research. Phenomenology revives experience in its expression, it is a “reflexive re-living and reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience” (Van Manen 1990: 36). The reader is interpreting what others, through their expressions, are interpreting of themselves. Expressions are the units of a continuous flow of experiences. “Through meditations, conversations, daydreams, inspirations and other interpretative acts we assign meaning to the phenomena of lived life” (ibid.: 37). In this sense, the main problem phenomenological researchers face is not that they know too little about the phenomenon they are investigating, but that they know too much. Common sense, suppositions, assumptions and previous scientific knowledge influence the nature of the interpretation even before arriving at the significance of the phenomenological question. As Van Manen proposes, it is better not to forget and make the previous understandings, beliefs, presuppositions and theories explicit and then deliberately confront them (1990: 47).

The influence of phenomenology and the study of experience are clearly noticeable, especially in the early works of feminist studies. “One of the critical motifs that dominated feminist scholarship throughout the 1970s was the idea of making women’s experience visible...” (Alcoff Martín 2000: 43), and validating that experience by confronting the various theories that supposedly understood and explained the nature of women. “From its inception, feminist scholarship and research in such fields as psychology, sociology, and anthropology was dedicated toward basing a new area of study on women’s own understanding and interpretation of *[their]* experience” (ibid.). However, later on, a critical

movement developed which asked how subjective experiences or women's own accounts can be accepted uncritically since they do not challenge gender ideology but just reproduce it. Simply studying experience will not produce change; for changes to happen, the focus has to be on more rational arguments that lead to the empowerment and inclusion of women. This motivated a shift of focus to discourse theory, structuralism and poststructuralism for alternative accounts of women and gender studies (Alcoff Martín 2000: 44).

4.2.2 POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND THE CRITICISM OF THE STUDY OF EXPERIENCE

Poststructuralism poses questions on matters of purity, essence, values and truth, and for this reason, poststructuralist thinkers have been accused of being relativist. However, Williams claims that even if there is a truth as consistency, there is a deeper truth as variation; "to deny absolutes, such as a certain core, is not to deny significant differences that we can act upon" (2005: 3). Therefore, poststructuralism is a practice always open to difference and to the new, or as mentioned in point 4.1.2.2, to new interpretations.

Scott (1991), putting into practice the critical poststructuralist thought against absolute certainties, states that when phenomenologists take experience as the origin of knowledge, "the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured –about language (or discourse) and history- are left aside" (Scott 1991: 777). Thus, in her view the evidence of experience reproduces rather than contests given ideological systems. Making experiences visible may expose differences but not reveal the way they are constituted; in order to achieve this, experience must be put into a context. In the historical process that produces experience through discourse: "it is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience" (ibid.: 779). Therefore, in her

view, it is this ‘constitution’ that needs to be explained through the historicizing of the experience entities produced. According to Scott, subjects are constituted discursively. These discourses could be contradictory and with possible multiple meanings. Subjects have agency, but not free will since their agency is framed by situations and the power conferred on them. “Subjects are constituted discursively and experience is a linguistic event (it doesn’t happen outside established meanings), but neither is it confined to a fixed order or meaning. Since discourse is by definition shared, experience is collective as well as individual” (Scott 1991: 793).

In Scott’s view, experience either confirms what we already know or questions it. The resolution of the problem when several meanings are in conflict allows us to learn from experience; but this learning is never the same from person to person. This is why, experience constitutes the history of a subject, and history as such is constituted through language. Scott does not deny experience; moreover, she acknowledges that we cannot do without it. She claims, “*experience* is so much a part of everyday language, so imbricated in our narratives that it seems futile to argue for its expulsion” (1991: 797). She admits its need and usefulness and asks for the analysis of its operations and the redefinition of its meaning; and in order to do that she proposes focusing on processes of identity production and the political discursive production of experience. “Experience is at once always already an interpretation *and* something that needs to be interpreted” (ibid.).

With her assertions, Scott is actually demonstrating that poststructuralist thought, as explained by Williams (2005) seeks to cross the boundaries of knowledge and establish disruptive relations. She tries to break with the way previous knowledge was constructed. However, her way of understanding ‘experience’ produced much criticism. Stone-Mediatore (1998) claims that Scott has devalued experience to the point that it is only analysable through rhetorical mechanisms and has no power to offer critical perspectives through its narration. Dismissing stories of experience is also a way to deny the work and value of so many theorists, mainly feminists who have worked with the raw material of experience

to propose radical transformations in gender theory. Stone-Mediatore adds that even if Scott has criticized the empirical approach to experience, her approach is also limited because in her view, it is not possible to go beyond discourse (1998: 120). In other words, Scott has flattened experience into a discursively constituted perception. She “can recognize only two ways of treating experience: a naive empiricist presentation of experience as evidence, or an (objectifying) analysis of the language in which others have represented experience” affirms Stone-Mediatore (1998: 122). This is how the notion of subjective existence is lost and experience inquiry is reduced to discourse.

Along the same line of criticism, Alcoff Martín (2000) claims that Scott has turned experience into an epiphenomenon produced outside of the individual and that its value is reduced to the interests of language theory or rhetorical analysis. This is why, poststructuralist feminism tends to deny the cognitive importance of experience since it would only be a result of the interplay between discourses (2000: 39). According to Martín Alcoff, Scott’s work has been so influential that it is “partly responsible for the eclipse of phenomenology within feminist theory” (2000: 45).

Alcoff Martín adheres to the phenomenological principle by which experience exceeds language; it can also be inarticulate. Language presents itself as one of the many possible expressions and an expression never fully conveys experience. Experience cannot be understood only in referencing to language. Alcoff Martín also points to reason, theory, bodily and subjective experience as important elements for the development of feminist knowledge in order to gain epistemic credibility. Alcoff Martín’s position is one of phenomenological apology as she is against the belief that phenomenology only develops “metaphysical accounts of experience outside of culture and history” (2000: 43). She even adds: “though in reality phenomenology and post-structuralism are not wholly opposed, too often they operate as if they are mutually exclusive, and this has helped to spawn a growing divide between feminist work in the social sciences influenced by phenomenology and feminist work in the humanities influenced by post-

structuralism” (ibid.). It must be acknowledged, though, that there is also a certain tension between feminism in general and phenomenology because the latter has been accused of being ‘male-biased’ in its structure and orientation (Fisher 2000: 22). However, as Fisher states, they share a “commitment to descriptive and experiential analysis where the systematic examination and articulation of the nature of lived experience, along with the attendant theoretical and practical implications, functions as the basis for reflective discourse. Indeed, in a fundamental sense the cornerstone of feminist theory and politics is the elaboration and analysis of the particular situation and experience of being a woman” (2000: 33).

Even if Alcoff Martin disagrees with the way Scott conceptualizes experience, she does confirm that “discourse permeates and affects experience” (2000: 47); but that does not mean that experience is just a linguistic event. If the unarticulated forms of experience are not accepted then we are ignoring forms of “oppression that could not be expressed under reigning regimes of discourse. A better view would be one which understood experience and discourse as imperfectly aligned, with locations of disjuncture” (Alcoff Martín 2000: 47). She also calls attention to specific bodies and histories, not only to macro textual representations. She grasps phenomenological concepts of experience formulated by phenomenological philosophers like Husserl and Merleau-Ponty just to demonstrate that experience exceeds cognition, and that it is cognition and much more. “Lived experience is open-ended, plural, fragmented, and shifting not because of the limitations of language, but because of the nature of embodied, temporal existence” (2000: 49). For Alcoff Martin subjectivity and meaning are anchored in the real world; “...meaning is produced through the embodied actions of consciousness in the world...and subjectivity cannot be theorized apart from its lived, embodied experience” (2000: 50). Experience, in this sense, does have a material context that is not only represented by language, but also by other non-discursive practices that in a phenomenological understanding can be called expressions. Therefore, not all these expressions are coincidental with the “realm

of language”. Elements such as choices, intentions and feelings may be present in discourse and discourse analysis can be complemented by phenomenological descriptions which get us closer to perceiving these elements. Therefore the narration of experiences increases our knowledge.

It is clear from all this that, according to Alcoff Martin, phenomenological descriptions and discourse analysis are not exclusive but complementary. Nevertheless, Oksala (2011) claims that even if Alcoff Martin advocates for phenomenological descriptions for “strategic reasons”, she fails to address the problem when phenomenology or “philosophy of the subject” tries to move beyond the empirical to the more abstract. Her perception is that phenomenology “subsumes the objective under the subjective” (2011: 220). In order to resolve this situation Oksala takes on board Foucault’s propositions, especially the concept of experience, although she does acknowledge that he was not considered a philosopher of this subject. Oksala shows that experience for Foucault actually exceeds linguistic representations, being constituted of “both discursive and non-discursive practices” (2011: 212); therefore, “individual experiences are constituted by games of truth and power, but they in turn affect and modify these practices” (ibid.: 213). Oksala expresses that, for Foucault, objectivation was present in the domains of knowledge and subjectivation in the reflexive relations to the self, and both of them were interrelated to power practices. Practices are very important since through them experience becomes intelligible, and in order to understand ourselves we must analyse our practices and their meanings (which are not prone to being reduced just to discourses). Oksala recognizes that linguistic description inevitably struggles “to capture even partially the richness of experience”. For Oksala, Foucault is not dismissing the “epistemic indispensability of subjective experience. The problem with phenomenology, is not the attempt to theorize lived experiences. The problem is that experience is treated as foundational and epistemically self-sufficient” (2011: 200). Thus, Scott and Foucault share the same fundamental criticism of the study of experience.

4.2.3 A RECONCILIATION IS POSSIBLE

Having reviewed some of the main issues raised by phenomenologists and poststructuralists in relation to experience, one is left with the feeling that the discussion never ends; at times they get very close but other times they diverge. Sometimes it seems to be more a problem of terminology, as each group resists understanding the other in the other's 'language' and proposes slightly differing new concepts and ideas. At the risk of being very simplistic, reductionist and guilty of the sin of painting so many influential authors with the same brush, I think the following assertions can be made:

Phenomenology is concerned with the question of experience; it is its object of study. Heuristic phenomenology poses itself the task of interpreting the descriptive interpretations we make of our experiences. Experiences are intelligible to us through expressions; one of these expressions can be linguistic articulation. So, a good way to approach experience is through the study of its expressions. However, for phenomenologists it is clear that experience exceeds the capacity of language, that there is a "surplus" of meaning that just cannot be grasped. And signification is possible because of our "being in the world"; hence, the self in relation to the world makes of us historical beings. Experience registers life through the filter of culture.

A poststructural critical position towards the study of experience says that it is a mistake to treat experience as the evidence without asking how it is constituted. If we have to refer to this problem we must address historical and cultural elements which affect, and are affected by, our practices. Therefore, experience is not only discourse, it also refers to non-discursive practices. One of the problems with phenomenology, according to poststructuralists, is that focusing on the 'self', the subjective constructions, it struggles to give an account of the macro and the social. Poststructuralism does not deny the value of experience; it takes it as an element that must be interrelated with more objective elements and power forces.

Experience is constitutive and constituted, but not the only base for our understanding.

Feminist studies have a 'love-hate' relationship with phenomenology. Feminism was born calling attention to the experience of women and marginal experiences in general; and because phenomenology has been so concerned with experience as an object of study, the link between feminist studies and phenomenology was, and still is, obvious. However, many feminists criticize phenomenological authors by accusing them of being male biased, since the 'experience' they refer to is not being analyzed as gendered. Besides, narrating women's experiences is fruitless because it is a reproductive ideological mechanism without the power to transform reality. Consequently, mainstream feminism shifted towards poststructuralism in order to have a more critical tool that allowed not only an understanding of the world, but also an active political engagement.

In spite of everything which has been exposed previously, the question here is this: Are phenomenology and poststructuralism really so incompatible? The answer seems to be no. According to Stoller (2006), phenomenology and poststructuralism both theorize experience, and therefore it is more useful to understand the complementarity of approaches, rather than looking at them as opposites. Stoller claims that she does not understand why there should be such theoretical confrontations such as 'pre-discursiveness versus discursiveness' or 'experience versus language'. She regards "theoretical struggle as inefficient, unproductive, misleading and even wrong" (2006: 3). It is obvious that these two theoretical positions are more inclined to study this, that or the other according to their main needs and interests; and for that they have created their own terminology coming from a specific standpoint. But that does not make them mutually exclusive; they both care about experience, they both acknowledge the importance of subjectivity and objectivity, they recognize the importance of the historical being, and they admit that experience is something more than just language. One of them talks about expressions and narratives, the other about practices and discourse, but both of them acknowledge that experience is an

interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted. It would be too naive to treat phenomenology as a field only interested in the self and subjectivity and poststructuralism in objectivity and historical contextualization. And last, but not least, they both share an “interest for a better understanding of experience with respect to feminist concerns and, at the same time, the interest in a strong and powerful notion of experience” (Stoller 2006: 6); hence, the best and wisest strategy is to see the two positions as complementary as this will result in a more holistic understanding of human experience.

As a final reflection, Hekman (2008) calls for an understanding of the complex relationship between language and the real without prioritizing either of the two. This objective has produced what Hekman calls, the emergence of ‘new settlements’. However, she herself acknowledges that being able to account for the real beyond discourse is a task that still remains elusive (2008: 90). These new settlements which contest many of the principles of modern science constitute a new paradigm that is coming into being. This new paradigm is influenced by different authors and proposals from various fields; and according to Heckman it is a theory that “incorporates language, materiality, and technology into equation” (2008: 91). It is a challenging proposal for it looks for new approaches to phenomena and new ways to gain knowledge. This proposal and all the theoretical considerations developed so far in this chapter constitute the epistemological and conceptual framework that helps me in the analysis of the data collected through interviews. Nevertheless, this does not mean that my analysis is exempt from using a range of specific theories and notions in order to shed light on the different and varied topics that I develop in the following chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INTERNET EXPERIENCE IN CONTEXT

In this chapter we start the analysis of the data obtained in the interviews with the women. In the analysis I decided to follow the same logic with which the interviews were conducted; I give a presentation of the women's personal experience in relation to computers and the Internet, an introduction of their present situation, how they access the Internet and what is the nature of their online activity. This introduction provides a frame from which we can develop a more interpretative analysis of specific topics in the chapters to come. Before we start, however, let us first develop a more detailed description of the women, the subjects of study, so the reader can get acquainted with who they actually are as individuals.

5.1 ABOUT THE WOMEN INTERVIEWED

As briefly explained in chapters one and three, nineteen women who were undertaking a postgraduate course in the field of Education and Technology were interviewed for this research. The students on the course were divided into two groups or cohorts. This postgraduate programme represented an extraordinary coordinated effort between several institutions from different countries; it was undertaken within a finite timeframe and was therefore not the type of university course that is regularly given as standard. The group division was done to manage the number of students and the course teaching. The first cohort had ten female students and the second had nine. For the administrative reasons already stated, it was decided that one group should start lessons one semester after the other.

The cohort, or group division of the students, has almost no relevance to this study, for all the women were considered either as individuals or as part of the whole group. It is only when discussing Internet content production are we reminded that their educational programme started at two different times,

specifically when the women in the first group mention webpage or blog creation due to a specific requirement of a course they had already undertaken. When I started to gather and make sense of their personal data (regardless of the cohort to which they belonged), I realized that for the aim of introducing the women I could present them in groups of two, three or four because of their similar characteristics. The main criteria used when putting them together were the following: age (from the youngest to the oldest), marital status (whether they had children or not; all the married women had children, all the single ones did not). While grouping them by age, I started to realize, for example, that the youngest ones, aged thirty or less, had been introduced to computers and the Internet simultaneously, while all the others had been introduced first to computers and then later to the Internet.

Let me now introduce the women. I will first outline their most relevant individual characteristics, then I will design a chart in order to present these characteristics, and finally I will bring them together to briefly comment on the main similarities and differences. As all the women signed a confidentiality agreement, false names or nicknames were assigned to each to protect their real identities.

Nora and Sara

These two are the youngest of the women; Nora is 25 and Sara is 28. Nora studied Pedagogy and Sara Systems Engineering. Nora works as an Education Consultant and Sara in Human Resources. Both are single and have no children. Nora is the only who comes from a city other than Cochabamba, but she still lives with family members. Sara lives with her parents and brother. Nora and Sara are, together with Ruby, the ones who became familiar with computers alongside the Internet when they were in their teenage years.

Ruby and Lila

Both Ruby and Lila are 30 years old, single and have no children. Ruby studied Psychology and is a project coordinator. Lila studied Economics and is a university departmental director. Lila lives with her parents and Ruby is the only one of the nineteen women in the group who lives alone. Ruby and Lila were introduced to the Internet as teenagers, with Lila already knowing about computers from her early childhood.

Ana and Inés

Ana and Inés are both 30 years old, married and have children. They both studied Pedagogy; Inés currently works at a university and Ana at a school. The two became acquainted with computers and the Internet in their teenage years.

Olga and Rosa

Olga and Rosa are both 32, single and have no children. Olga studied Social Communications and is a university teacher. Rosa studied Dentistry and is currently a practising dentist and school music teacher. They both received their first computer in their early teens and had Internet access by their late teens.

Tati, Beta, Emma and Cindy

Tati and Beta are 33 years old and Emma and Cindy are 34. All of them are married and all have children. Tati, Emma and Cindy have one child each and all of them studied courses related to economics and finance, and are now university teachers. Beta studied Systems Engineering and, apart from being a teacher, owns and runs a business which sells natural products. She has four children. Tati, Beta, Emma and Cindy were introduced to computers in their early teens and the Internet in their late teens, or even their early twenties.

Clara, Brisa and Fanny

Clara is 34, Brisa 35 and Fanny 38. They are all single and live with their parents or other family members. They do not have children. Clara studied Industrial Engineering and used to work as a marketing consultant while Brisa studied Social Communications and Fanny, Information Technology. They are both university teachers. Clara knew about computers in her childhood while Brisa and Fanny in their teens. None of the three started using the Internet until they were in their early 20s.

Lyn, Vivi, Isa and Mili

These four are all in their forties, Lyn is 41, Vivi 43, Isa 48 and Mili 49. Lyn is married and has three children; she studied Industrial Engineering and is a teacher in an institute. Vivi and Mili are single and live with their parents. Both studied Systems Engineering and are university teachers. Isa is the only one in the group who is divorced and has one child, she studied languages and is a school teacher. Lyn, the youngest of the four, was introduced to computers in her mid-teens, the others in their early twenties, and all started using the Internet in their late twenties.

The following chart presents an overview of the nineteen women who have just been introduced. They are listed from the youngest to the oldest, with information on their marital status, pre-grade studies undertaken, the age when they first acquired a computer, and the age they had and the year in which they first accessed the Internet. This provides a unified visual summary of the profiles of the women.

#	NAME	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	STUDIES	AGE FIRST TIME PC	AGE INTERNET CONN.	YEAR INTERNET CONN.
1	Nora	25	Single, living with uncle	Pedagogy	15	15	2002
2	Sara	28	Single, living with parents	Systems Engineering	12	12	1996

3	Ruby	30	Single, living alone	Psychology	16	16	1998
4	Lila	30	Single, living with mum, sister and niece	Economy	6	14	1996
5	Inés	30	Married, one child Living with parents	Pedagogy	15	21	2003
6	Ana	30	Married, one child	Pedagogy	18	19	2000
7	Olga	32	Single, living with family	Social Communication	10	21	2000
8	Rosa	32	Single, living with parents	Odontology	13	19	1999
9	Tati	33	Married, one child, Extended family	Economy	10	21	1999
10	Beta	33	Married, four children Extended family	Systems engineering	8	18	1996
11	Emma	34	Married, one child	Economy	18	19	1996
12	Clara	34	Single, living with aunt	Industrial Engineering	7	20	1998
13	Cindy	34	Married, one child	Industry Engineering	12	22	2000
14	Brisa	35	Single, living with extended family	Social Communication	20	22	1999
15	Fanny	38	Single, living with parents, siblings, others	Informatics	19	22	1996
16	Lyn	41	Married, three children, extended family	Industry Engineering	14	25	1996
17	Vivi	43	Single, living with father	Systems Engineering	20	26	1995
18	Isa	48	Divorced, one child	Languages	20	35	1998
19	Mili	49	Single, living with parents, sister, nephews	Systems Engineering	17	31	1994

As can be seen, the ages of the women in the group range from 25 to 49; out of the total of nineteen, thirteen of the women (this is more than two thirds) are in their 30s. In Bolivia, it is quite common to undertake postgraduate studies over the age of 30 as most undergraduate courses last five years or more, and after which the person usually starts working and sets up a family. Postgraduate studies are seen as professional development, and are mostly undertaken only after starting work and a family. This is why all the women in this research have a relative economic independence. Perhaps their income is not enough to keep a family, but they usually complement their salary with others in the family. It is in this way that they manage to live as most middle-class people do in Bolivia. The women's economic independence, therefore, is a factor to be taken into account when understanding their perception of the price of Internet provision.

Seven of the women are married, one is divorced and eleven are single. All of those married or divorced had children. All the single women were childless. It is important to point out that, with one exception, none of the women, whether single or married, lived alone. Single adult people in Bolivia, regardless if they are men or women, usually live with their parents or other family members.³⁴ Even if married couples form their own family, many keep living inside the parental home or very close to it. Family and relatives as a social category proves to be very relevant in the analysis of the Internet experience as will be seen in chapter seven.

There is a factor that has not yet been mentioned, neither in the introduction to the women nor on the chart; out of the nineteen women thirteen had attended private school, which further corroborates the rather good economic position of their families. However, most of them, twelve to be precise, obtained their undergraduate degrees at a public university. This is a demonstration of something to which I made reference in chapter two: the good reputation of public universities. So, looking at the school and university levels for all of the women, we can see that there was a more or less equal balance in the number of

³⁴ More about family and social relations is explained in chapter two, point 2.2.1. Page 29.

those who went to private or public institutions. I had initially thought that the type of schooling the women had received was very relevant in the analysis; however, their narratives do not point to any obvious correlation between this factor and their Internet experience.

In relation to the professional careers they decided to pursue, there is almost an equal number of women who work within the field of ‘hard sciences’ and that of ‘soft sciences’. Eight of them were engineers or IT professionals, while the others opted for mostly social sciences.³⁵ Last but not least, the fact that all of them learnt about computers in their early teens and had access to and used the Internet in their late teens or early twenties makes them ‘digital immigrants’ (Prensky 2001). This means they were born before the boom of the digital age and had to adopt and adapt to the use of new technologies later in life. However, having access to computers at an early age in a country in which technology is expensive and not easily accessed, makes them a privileged group in relation to the great majority of Bolivians.

The main personal elements outlined here, such as marital status, education and occupation, are related to the analysis when they prove to be important to the topic in discussion for a specific person or persons. These categories are clearly pre-existing and serve to provide an outline of who the women are. They should not be understood as fixed indicators used to measure degrees of influence which directly affect the Internet experience, whether comparatively or as group generalizations.

5.2 THEIR FIRST CONTACT WITH COMPUTERS AND THE INTERNET

During the period in which the interviews were conducted the pattern of access to the internet for most of the women was very similar, both in terms of time spent online and the time of the day online. They were students fully engaged on a

³⁵ In Appendix two, a table with the main characteristics of the women under study can be found. This helps to understand the general similarities and differences in age, marital status, education and occupation. See p. 329.

course that required them to be online on a daily basis and for several hours. Their current habits were discussed, but I was also interested in a retrospective look in order to know more about their personal history in relation to computers and the Internet. I wanted to know when they got acquainted with computers and how and when they became Internet users. This information would help me to construct timelines for each person that eventually helped me to put everything into perspective; to get to know the circumstances, factors or people that had been relevant in the process and evaluate how confident they were with computers and the Internet in the past and in the present.

An overall generalization is not really possible because each case differs from another and each life-story has a different development. However, even if the degree of influence of one variable upon another cannot be inferred as in statistical analysis, some assertions can be made that apply only to this specific group of women. For instance, after a close reading of all nineteen accounts on their first time experience with computers, it can be stated that in most cases their parents' decisions were crucial for this first contact. Parents would decide when to buy a computer for home or when to enrol their daughters in an institution to learn about computers. The parents evaluated their children's educational needs, age and their own economic resources in taking this influential decision.

"I got my first computer in 1989 the same year I entered university, I had decided to study Information Technology, so my mum bought it for me. I was 19 years old" (Vivi).

"I was 13 years old in 1993 when my parents first bought a computer for our home... It was bought because my father needed it; but it was also useful for me and my sister" (Rosa).

"Courses to learn how to use computers were provided in an institute around the corner from home. I remember that one day my dad came home and said that I should go to take lessons. I was 15 years old" (Lyn).

In the case of Vivi it was her mother who provided her with a computer, with Lyn it was her father who wanted her to learn about computers, and in Rosa's case both parents were themselves interested in getting a computer for the family; so parents, regardless of gender, exerted an influence on their daughters regarding their introduction to and use of computers. However, even if there was personal initiative and family choice in starting to use computers in most cases, schools also played a role in the process. Nonetheless, whether the education was private or public had some influence on its nature. Both types of school offer computer lessons; the difference, if any, is that private schools have better equipped computer labs and started providing lessons some years before public schools did.

"I was 14 years old, in 1997 when I first learnt about computers, it was at school... At home the first computer was bought in 2002 for my entrance to university" (Sara, private school).

"I used computers for the first time when I was 15 years old in 2002, they were available at school. We only had one at home in 2007 because it was very expensive" (Nora, public school).

Most parents and schools chose teenager years as the period in which students should start using computers. Even the women who studied in public schools, which by tradition have less resources, said that they had the opportunity to use computers in their education. However, all of them admitted that the access and computer use at schools was limited, something that was in contrast to the situation at home. However, families paid a lot of attention to the high costs a computer represented.

"In 1988 my parents bought a PC for my older brother. I remember that it was very expensive and I was not allowed to use it until 1995 because I could possibly break it. I started to use it when they got a new computer for him" (Emma).

Isa, for instance, being the oldest of the women, was one of the few who bought her first computer herself, at that time she was 34 and already working, but even for her it represented a huge expense.

“In 1998 I started going to Internet cafés and that year I bought my first computer, it was very expensive, more or less 1600 dollars, it was a real investment” (Isa).

In Bolivia, computers started to be popular in the late eighties and early nineties, and despite the high cost, many people were making an effort to acquire them. Therefore, it cannot be denied that individual economy and the possibility of buying technology are related; the expense may delay acquisition, but in the end people who regard computers as important and useful are willing to pay for the ‘investment’.

“When I was in second grade in high school and almost 15 years old, computer lessons were starting... computers were extremely expensive, but my parents let me decide if I wanted a 15th birthday party or a fully equipped computer as a present, the cost being more or less the same... of course I chose the latter” (Beta).

A fifteenth birthday in Bolivia and many other Latin American countries is a key turning point in a young girl’s life, a rite of passage from childhood to womanhood, and is perceived as deserving to be celebrated with an impressive party or a very important present. Knowing this, the comparison of getting a computer instead of a birthday party demonstrates not only how highly valued technology can be in a developing society, but also how the gadget itself represents social value.

However, not having a computer at home did not prevent the women from learning about and using computers in other settings such as schools, specialized institutes or Internet cafés. Fanny, who graduated in Information Technology in

2000, remembers having to finish her studies using only “public” computers and having to borrow one in order to work on her thesis defence.

“It was only in 2009 I got my first computer; I bought it myself because my work demanded I had my own PC” (Fanny).

The fact is that almost all of the women became acquainted with computers some years before becoming familiar with the Internet. Only the ones who are 30 years old or younger (no more than four in this research) confirmed that the computers which they first used already had an Internet connection. Fourteen out of the nineteen had used the Internet for the first time in public spaces and only later did they have Internet access at home.

“I remember having gone with my friends to an Internet café near the university to create my first e-mail account; we had computer at home, but not Internet... I don’t remember the year (Lila).

“When the Internet arrived I started going to Internet cafés, but almost immediately after that my parents got a dial-up contract for home” (Beta).

“In 1998 I had Internet access at the university and at my boyfriend’s work. In 2000 we got dial-up at home” (Brisa).

Thus, although the 19 different cases are not exemplified here, what can be inferred from their timelines³⁶ in relation to computers and the Internet is that many of the women had access to computers between 1985 and 1995, and all of them became acquainted with the Internet between 1995 and 2002. So, most of them (except for those over 40 at the time of the data collection) learnt about computers either in their early or late teens, and the decision whether to buy a computer for the home was very much dependent on parental support, need, economic possibility and interest in computers.

³⁶ For the complete numerical tables with years and age of initial computer and Internet access, see Appendix three. Page 331.

“My parents made a lot of effort. They knew nothing about computers but always supported us, first when I finished school they wanted me to be better communicated so they got a fixed phone line at home. Then they saved money for a computer because, although at that time it was a luxury, they always wanted us to have the means to study. I am sure that if we had asked for an Internet connection they would have provided for us, but when my brother and I went to ask about for the prices it was too expensive and we decided that we could manage by going to Internet-cafés, half a dollar an hour...” (Inés).

During the interview process Inés made it clear that she had had an austere upbringing as her parent’s did not have much money; even so, as was the case in most of the women’s families, parents made an effort to provide their children with computers in the home. So, in short, most of the women became acquainted with computers in the private domestic sphere, while with the Internet the experience was the opposite. First use of the Internet was through public facilities and only later did they use it at home. A plausible explanation for this is that it has only been in the last few years, specifically since the mid-2000s, that an Internet broadband connection has become widely diffused and has formed part of the home in the major cities. Internet availability was not common before then because of the lack of infrastructure and problems related to cost.

5.3 INTERNET ACCESS

During the data collection period in the autumn of 2012, all the women had Internet access from home and all of them had a personal laptop that could be used on the university campus through a Wi-Fi connection. Many of the women had acquired laptops in the years prior, mainly because they needed them for work; the ones who had not done so had bought new ones at the start of their postgraduate study.

The time they spent online during this period, as well as the time of day that they chose to access the Internet was very much conditioned by their daily routines

and their course requirements. If they were not connected during the day due to study or work reasons, they usually chose to be online in the evening or early morning, this is when they did ‘their things’, in addition to anything else they needed to do.

“Before the master, I was online around three hours a day after my working day was over. It was then I opened my mail, Facebook and read the news. I was even playing some games, but now I am happy to spend more time online because of this course. Now I can, and must be, online at least eight hours a day” (Isa).

“I am always online. I used to access the Internet only from home, but this week I got a USB 3G modem from my mobile company, so I have that and my laptop with me all the time” (Brisa).

Isa and Brisa both recognize how important the Internet has become for them although they have completely different lifestyles; Isa is one of the oldest women in the group, divorced with children and with two jobs, while Brisa is single and living with her parents.

As the women’s lessons were of the ‘blended learning’ type, with both classroom and online sessions, some courses and some teachers required them to be physically present while others did not. It was therefore evident to me that the characteristics of the master course required that they had access to the Internet throughout the day, whether they were at the university or at home.

“I am usually online all day, well at least my PC is always on. I like to see what is going on in the morning, in the afternoon and at night. Of course, when I am studying for the course I am there all the time, I don’t go to sleep, until I finish... most of the time I do homework, then I chat and the rest is for me, for my things” (Sara).

Although most of them stated that they had considerably increased the amount of time they spent online, there is always an exception to the rule.

“Ten years ago when I was a bachelor student, the Internet was my vice! And I didn’t even have Internet at home. I could chat for hours in an Internet café, but with the years and my work I am less and less attached to the Internet (Ruby).

“I would say that in spite of this course, now I am sort of resting from the Internet. Before I was really hooked to it, in part because of my job. I could spend days without going out...” (Clara).

Ruby and Clara had clearly reduced their time online; however, they and the other women recognized that the time pattern varied according to the daily activities in which they were involved, usually a job, studies or family obligations.

“... now I am still online every day, usually at noon, after lunch or late evening, after I have done the household chores” (Clara).

Nevertheless, there was still an overall tendency to spend more and more time online. What did not change was the means with which they connected to the Internet. This was usually through a desktop PC, and more recently through a laptop. Even though all of the women had a mobile phone, very few had a smartphone and those who did hardly ever used it to connect to the Internet.

“I don’t use the cell phone to be online, firstly because the connection is not good and secondly I get too nervous having to deal with such small things, it is not comfortable... and I keep on losing phones, what a waste! I prefer simple things” (Sara).

“Sometimes I would use my phone, but the truth is that you need a real good phone, a blackberry or an android and then something like 4G Internet connection. If you don’t have those basic things, it is a disaster. I prefer to be at home...” (Beta).

“I use the cell phones just to call and get calls, mine is too basic” (Isa).

Even if the mobile phone is very popular in Bolivia, not everybody has a smartphone; not only because of the cost but also as there is a lot of crime related to the theft of mobile phones. As a matter of fact, the government issued Decree n°0353 in November 2009 which obliged users to register their devices and phone companies to block them in the case of theft. This was done as a direct response to the high number of phone thefts.

Phone theft may have diminished³⁷, but has not been eliminated; it is still common for people to avoid using phones in the streets or in public places to reduce the possibility of being robbed. This situation, in addition to consumers regarding mobile internet as not very reliable and the almost non-existent access to free Wi-Fi in public places, has resulted in mobile internet not being a popular option in Bolivia. Besides, the desktop PC is still the most popular piece of computer hardware; laptops are much more expensive for the average person, and tablets and pads were not that popular by the time this research was conducted, which was demonstrated by the fact that none of the women owned one.

5.4 INTERNET COSTS

As in other developing countries, both technology and technological service provision in Bolivia is expensive and consequently only a part of the population can afford it. Distribution tends to be uneven and invariably more expensive for the few ones who can get it as, in effect, it is a service not available to the mass market. It is a similar situation with the technological goods which have to be imported from industrialized countries; the retail price is much higher in developing countries. The people in these countries have to pay elevated prices in addition to having low incomes (James 2002; Kwaku Kyem 2010).

As already stated in chapter two, Internet provision in Bolivia is the most expensive in the region. A home ADSL connection represents up to a third or

³⁷ In spite of the governmental measures against mobile theft, the ATT (Telecommunications and Transport Authority in Bolivia) reported that almost half a million mobile phones were stolen in the period 2010 – 2013. Villa, M. (2013). El primer trimestre, 398 celulares fueron robados o perdidos por día. La Razón. La Paz.

more of a minimum salary. My interviewees are professional women on a salary or who run small businesses and this gives them much more than a minimum income. However, as is typical in Bolivia, one income in the family is not sufficient to make ends meet and as a result most adult members in the family contribute to the household economy. When asked about their economic situation, the women considered themselves neither rich nor poor in terms of acquisitive power; that is to say they labelled themselves as ‘middle class’.

Considering the cost of Internet provision from most companies in the city of Cochabamba, it came as a surprise to me to know that many of the women did not consider Internet expensive.

“I pay fifty dollars a month for 1Mb/s. Expensive? No, I don’t think it is expensive” (Ana).

“My mum and I pay for a six month service contract, it’s good because one month is for free. I don’t think it is very expensive, the problem is that the service is not very good” (Sara).

“The Internet is not expensive anymore. At the beginning yes, almost one dollar an hour, but now it is only a quarter, though of course I know there are extremely poor people who can’t even afford that” (Rosa).

Ana, Sara and Rosa do not consider the cost of Internet provision expensive, regardless of who paid for it; themselves or the family. Some of the women were paying the Internet service themselves and some were sharing the cost with others. In some cases the Internet bill was part of the larger family economy and maybe that was a reason why they would not consider it expensive.

“I share costs with my sister, although it doesn’t seem to be very expensive though. I don’t know how fast the speed is though” (Lila).

“At home we divide costs between everyone who uses the Internet, so actually it doesn’t become that expensive” (Brisa).

“I’ve got no idea about the speed of my connection, but it’s always getting better. My father pays, he doesn’t consider it expensive, but we have the ‘combo’ plan, which includes TV and phone” (Olga).

“The Internet costs 50 USD per month, but at home we share computers and the bill” (Fanny).

“The business pays, our retail business, and we use the WiFi from the shop. We have discount as an enterprise, if not it would be too expensive” (Beta).

The previous statements demonstrate how for some of the women meeting the cost of the Internet is a shared effort within the family, regardless of their own marital status. The fact that many of the women did not know the speed of their connection prevented them from calculating a byte-cost relation. The ones who did acknowledge that the Internet service was expensive were the ones who, in one way or another, were aware of the comparative costs of Internet provision in Bolivia in relation to other countries. In other words, for them it was expensive because the facts demonstrated it was expensive.

“In Bolivia the Internet is very expensive. I did a course on these things, and compared to other places it is very expensive. I pay 300 USD for six months” (Clara).

“Yes, it’s expensive. I checked it in relation to the speed and we rank very badly at a global level” (Tati).

“It’s expensive if we think in terms of the minimum salary, 120 or 150 USD, and it’s too much if you have to pay 200 USD for home connection, it is too much” (Emma).

“I pay one third of the minimum salary, it is very expensive” (Lyn).

It could be interesting to note that when the women express that the cost is expensive they do it using the ‘impersonal’ third person, but when they assert the opposite it is usually done in the first person, emphasizing that for them it is not

expensive. This led me to conclude that even if Internet service is expensive³⁸, from the women's perception it is affordable, or they make it affordable, mainly because they find ways for it not to become an economic burden.

"I only pay my daily consumption, which is usually around two dollars a day" (Inés).

And, above all, they do not mind paying for something they consider to be an investment and a necessity.

"Since it is a necessity I don't find it expensive, I pay it myself" (Ruby).

Even if the technology of information, whether it be computers or Internet provision, is still a luxury for most Bolivians, or at least represents a considerable expense for the family budget, it has become a basic necessity and is understood as such by the majority of the population. However, meeting this need is perceived as being the responsibility of the individual rather than something which is provided as a basic universal right by the state to everyone at an affordable price. This reality consequently creates the conditions for the growth and consolidation of the "software piracy" phenomenon.

5.4.1 SOFTWARE PIRACY

In general terms 'Internet piracy', and specifically 'software piracy', refers to a type of global crime related to the unauthorized use, reproduction, distribution and sale of software, files and other works that have a copyright and/or property rights. According to the 2011 report on media piracy in emerging economies, "high prices for media goods, low incomes, and cheap digital technologies" are the main factors that lead to the global spread of this kind of crime especially in

³⁸ The lower classes tend to spend around 7 dollars a month on connecting to the Internet in Internet cafés, while higher classes can spend ten times that amount. Teenagers in general spend around a quarter of the minimum salary a month for leisure activities at Internet cafés. Choque Aldana, M. (2009) Avatares de la brecha digital. Desigualdades en el acceso y uso de nuevas tecnologías en la juventud de Cochabamba. Mediaciones Sociales 5,

the developing world (Karaganis 2011). In Bolivia this phenomenon is widely diffused and almost a cultural need.

“I was lucky, I hardly have any problems with viruses, even though I don’t run a licensed antivirus program...you know the problem, when you buy a computer here all the installed programs are pirate. My sister needs specific software because of her profession so she uses a licensed antivirus program, I know it’s better... but here we are just too good at piracy” (Rosa).

The global software piracy rate is 42% according to the Global Piracy Study.³⁹ In Bolivia, however, this number rises to 79%. Emerging economies have always been the “driving force behind PC software piracy” and nowadays they account for more than half of all computers in use (Business-Software-Alliance BSA 2011: 1). The women are conscious of the “illegality” of using pirated software, but their product choices are limited since piracy is so much a part of the market at all levels.

“Well, you know, if you buy a laptop at least the operating system comes with a licence, but we use desktop computers for our business and so we use free software. We tried once to use software that was developed in Bolivia, we bought it with licence but it was a disaster as each time we needed to change or format the computers we had to buy a new licence. It was impossible to maintain” (Beta).

“It’s really expensive to have legal software, my laptop has licensed Windows but all other computers at home have pirate software. In our company we work with open source, I know Ubuntu, then we use a lot of free software that you get on the Internet... My dream is to have an Apple computer, but that is just too expensive” (Lyn).

Money-related factors count for a lot when decisions have to be made in relation to computers and software. Maybe knowing that computers and software can be

³⁹ <http://globalstudy.bsa.org/2011/> Ninth Annual BSA Global Software 2011 Piracy Study. Business Software Alliance, IDC, Ipsos.

obtained at affordable prices thanks to the piracy phenomenon helps Bolivians to perceive the potentially prohibitive Internet costs as not so relevant. A lot of money can be saved on hardware and software. This does, however, imply security risks; risks which most Bolivians are ready to assume.

“I know the basics about security, my security level is medium. The important thing is to care about my privacy settings in Facebook, that’s what counts for me. When I get a virus, I have no other choice, I have to take it to the technician and have it repaired” (Vivi).

Vivi, who is a systems engineer, is not the only one who has had her computer repaired due to a virus infection. As a matter of fact, all the women have often had a similar experience; although they have a certain knowledge of online security, the fact of using illegal software leaves them in a very vulnerable position and affects their Internet use.

“I was using Adobe connector in my course, actually attending a lecture, I clicked on something and all the information was gone, something killed my laptop.... After that, I spent days without a computer, waiting for it to be fixed” (Isa).

All this may be true, but software vulnerability, Internet costs, access difficulties and other related factors do not seem to affect the readiness of the women to engage in many kinds of online activity, as will be observed.

5.5 INTERNET USE AND ONLINE ACTIVITIES

The following pages present a descriptive panorama mainly of the habitual activities the women perform online. These activities are divided between what they do most and what they do least. This description is a necessary step prior to going into a deeper and more analytical study in the subsequent chapters.

5.5.1 ‘WHAT THEY DO’

At the time of the interviews, the women’s Internet use ranged from activities that were purely study related to others that had become more habitual over recent years. Their student role required them to be online most of the day. Thus, when they were asked to describe what they usually did online, some of the women made a differentiation between the period prior to the course and during the course.

“Now, most of the time I search for information, I research... the rest of the time, I check mails, then Facebook” (Tati).

“The time I spend online has abruptly increased with this course. Now I use Facebook much more than before, but Facebook sometimes distracts me so much that I close it and start working” (Vivi).

When they were having online lessons they usually used a common e-learning platform called Moodle. However, they also worked and communicated in a less formal, academic-free environment such as Facebook. Each cohort had a Facebook group and also a common one for both cohorts. In these groups, the messages posted were mainly course related, since all of the women also had an individual Facebook account to share more personal material.

Although each woman had different interests, generally they tended to ‘split’ their Internet use between activities that could be called ‘formal duties’ (related to work or study, for instance) and more informal ones related to leisure or communication. This was the pattern for most of the women, whether they were single like Sara, or married like Emma.

“Most of the time I do my homework for the course, then I chat, and the rest is for me, my things” (Sara).

“60% of the time, I look for information, the other 40% I use it for communication, friends, chat” (Emma).

It would be unrealistic to try to make a list of their online activities in order of importance, or even in relation to the amount of time they spend on these activities, since it varies according to the time of the day, workload, offline activities or even their mood. Apart from that, it is not even fair to try to create a linear rigid flow of activities, since many times the Internet allows simultaneity of tasks.

“Mmm... I have all windows open at all times, but much of my time is spent on social networks and emails, research, and, of course, promoting my business and updating its web page” (Beta).

And, it cannot be confirmed that everybody does all that the medium allows.

“I use the Internet mainly for work: to prepare lessons, to grade and for e-mailing. I am not fond of chatting or social networks, I hardly do that, sometimes when I have time I listen to music” (Fanny).

“Maybe it is because of my education or my personality, but I always do my main task first and if I am looking for information there is no chat, no ‘Face’, no nothing. If I need to chat, I look for the specific person, I don’t chat with other people at the same time even if they talk to me. I don’t understand those people who turn on the computer and open thousands of windows, I just can’t, I open one, I close it, then another...” (Inés).

Even if it is not possible to establish a pattern of rigid online activity, it is plausible to affirm that there are some general activities which all of the women customarily do. They are:

- Browse and search online
- Chat and email
- Use Facebook
- Window shopping
- Varied leisure activities
- Download material

The list above is not an attempt at a categorization based on any specific criteria, in fact all the listed activities or items are not mutually exclusive, a clear example being Facebook which is an Internet domain where one can chat, play games, send messages, search for people and products, or sell, buy and publicize goods and services.

Johnson and Kaye (2003) state that various completed studies propose different lists of online activity. However, even if the number of activities has increased over the years and in relation to the always increasing number of online services, certain things still remain basic such as e-mailing and searching for information.

“When I am not working at the school and I am online, I love to read news online, newspapers, look for different topics. I like to be informed, if I read a topic that really interests me in the newspaper, then I go to Wikipedia to do more research” (Olga).

“I prefer to look for information on the Internet rather than watching TV.” (Isa).

Browsing is the *sine qua non* activity that leads to more specific ones like reading, listening and watching particular material either for information or entertainment; hence the importance of search engines and the know-how to use them.

“I always start with Google, first I am doing a normal search, then if I don’t find what I need, I go to an advanced search” (Inés).

“My start page is Google, of course” (Rosa).

Students use the Internet as a tool to do, among other things, research (Johnson 1997), and that includes a lot of browsing and searching for information. As the women participating in this research had stated that their main activity as students was undertaking research, working and looking for information online, I decided

to ask them if they were able to find what they were looking for. Many of them mentioned having some difficulties.

“No, I don’t find what I would like, for me it is very difficult, even because I am obsessive and I want to find exactly what I need. Maybe I don’t know how to use the Internet properly, I don’t know much about search engines” (Inés).

“Sometimes I don’t find what I look for, because maybe I don’t know how to look for it, but then it depends...” (Ruby).

“I think that if I don’t find it, it is because I am not looking with the appropriate words” (Olga).

When the women mention that they were not able to find the information they were looking for, they always made it clear that it was due to something related to them as users, something they did not know or something they were doing wrong. The fact that the information could possibly not be available on the Internet was out of the question for them, they had simply not considered it.

In 2011, a Pew Internet⁴⁰ survey revealed that the top five most common online adult activities in the United States were sending or receiving emails, using search engines, getting news, buying products, and social networking (Purcell 2011). Bridging the gaps of space, time and quantity of people in the above mentioned survey and this present work, it is possible to affirm that for the women these activities are still the most common, except for the buying products online. This will be discussed later on.

All the women use and check their email on a daily basis, and each of them have several email accounts; normally Hotmail, Gmail or an institutional address from

⁴⁰ The Pew Internet & American Life Project produces reports exploring the impact of the internet on families, communities, work and home, daily life, education, healthcare, and civic and political life. The Project aims to be an authoritative source on the evolution of the Internet through surveys that examine how Americans use the Internet and how their activities affect their lives. From: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2011/08/09/search-and-email-still-top-the-list-of-most-popular-online-activities/> (Last seen on 10/08/2013)

the company in which they work. In fact, obtaining an e-mail account was one of the main motivations for starting to use the Internet in the past. In fact, e-mail is the one online activity that the Pew Internet survey shows is common to most internet users regardless of age, education and income.

“It depends on the period, one day I can get up to 15 mails and next day I get nothing. Of course you get a lot of things that you do not need to answer...” (Brisa).

“I use email for work, for social interaction I prefer the phone. I have several accounts and I get a lot of mails per day, but most of them are ads and spam” (Clara).

E-mailing has been one of the most distinctive functions of the Internet since the beginning, and many specific programmes have been designed to support this function. However, it seems that since the introduction of social networks such as Facebook, which allow an exchange of messages, e-mailing, instant messaging and wall messaging are all now merging into one. The women did not make a clear distinction between these functions. They know they are different, but in the end they all belong to one category.

“In my mail I get everything, even Facebook notifications, so that makes around 100 messages per day. So, I usually make a quick selection at the end of the day, to see what to keep and what to disregard” (Sara).

“I usually get around seven or eight emails a day in my Hotmail account, but in Facebook, I get much more, around fifty messages a day. To chat I use either Facebook or Messenger” (Nora).

“There are two things I must do every day; first check Gmail and then Facebook... well, actually, I open both windows at the same time” (Olga).

All the women, without exception, had a Facebook account. Some of them mentioned previously being members of other social networks such as Sonico,

but with time they all migrated to Facebook. It is worth noting that Facebook is very popular in Bolivia. There are almost two million registered users⁴¹, and that is without mentioning the Bolivians living abroad who use it as their principal means of keeping in touch with their relatives and friends back home.

The following excerpt is from a group interview and it exemplifies the women's attitude towards Facebook:

Emma: "I think our habits are created by our needs. For instance, with Facebook, we need to be there everyday because we get messages and we send messages related to the course and we check if we have homework. We need to check what is going on, and not only for the course... most of my friends live in a different city so I communicate with them through Facebook".

Vivi: "Mmm...of course, at the beginning we had to use Facebook for our course, we even have a group there, but now it is a habit because we go there unconsciously, we turn on the computer and the first page we open is Facebook".

Ana: "It is not only a need, it is to satisfy curiosity. At the beginning I was not much of a fan of Facebook, but then I realized that's an ideal place to meet people, be in contact with old friends, get in touch with them, and at that point I told myself 'it is useful!'".

Online and offline social networks are psychologically interconnected and share many functions for people, such as the provision of social and emotional support, sources of information and links to other people. Moreover, online social networks have some characteristics of their own, for example social browsing and the development of new connections which may lead to an offline interaction in the future (Joinson 2008: 1027).

⁴¹ According to Internet World Stats by June 2012, Bolivia had a 30% of population Internet penetration (more than 3 million people) with 1,753,060 Facebook subscribers.
<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats2.htm#americas> (Last seen in September 2013).

“It’s as it is in the offline world. Me and my friends have certain places where we usually meet, but when the place is not popular anymore we look for a different one. It’s the same with Facebook. You go there because everybody is there and you need to communicate. Of course if a new social network comes out with a better interface then everybody will migrate there, and you will too because you need to communicate” (Sara).

The value of Facebook lies in its social capital. The fact that we look for other people and wish to be looked for that explains why so many users leave their privacy settings relatively open (Joinson 2008: 1028). This leads to a phenomenon called ‘social convergence’ and in which “disparate social contexts collapse into one” (Boyd 2008: 6) . For many users social convergence is not easy to handle as people behave according to the norms of the different social contexts of the offline world; however, when using social networks we gather together different audiences and control is lost to a certain extent, although we are able to manage the information more efficiently (ibid.).

Online social networks have limitations, but they do present opportunities. Social networks allow us to make a connection between our offline and online lives; in fact, in doing this they satisfy a social need and provide gratification. The online and offline are interdependent. For example, Cindy even felt that if she was not on Facebook then she would have problems interacting in her offline world.

“I was at a party some days ago and everybody was speaking about Facebook. If you’re not on Facebook, you actually feel disconnected from your friends, and so online networks are also a way of connecting offline” (Cindy).

Social network sites may lead to strangers meeting, but that is not their primary goal. The main purpose of online social networks is to connect people who are already part of our existing offline world, and for this reason there are people who do not feel the allure of these sites.

“I am not fanatic, I can live without Facebook. I prefer to meet real people” (Fanny).

It was clear that Fanny was one of the very few who showed no enthusiasm for actively participating on social online networks. This was most probably related to her personality, as being single and working with computers all the time would have given her the time and know-how to access Facebook, for example. As a matter of fact, Brisa’s response to my question about what could happen if there were no online social networks exemplifies the attitude of most of the women.

“Without Facebook, the Internet would be a SAD place to be” (Brisa).

Brisa’s short statement says a lot about how emotions and feelings are also involved in habitual online activities. The need for social interaction motivates a use of the Internet which then satisfies the need. But satisfaction along with other feelings such as fear, guilt and hope will be discussed later in chapter eight.

It is clear that the Internet has become simply another element in the daily routine of the women and they use it to satisfy various needs within the scope of the medium available to them. One of the things that they are fond of doing is collecting information about products, or what is more commonly known as ‘window shopping’. This process does not necessarily mean that they are considering buying the product, they are just ‘checking’. “Browsing, and in general, product searching, is the first stage of the online shopping experience” (Rowley 2002: 369). Product searching was a commonly mentioned activity when the women were asked what they usually did online during their free time.

“I like to check the online newspaper classified ads, I am very curious about property, real estate prices, car prices and car models. I’m not interested in beauty products... I look for specific things” (Lila).

“I look for fashion products and fashion trends, they are things and topics which I like, so if I am interested in those things offline, I don’t see why I shouldn’t be also online” (Sara).

“Because of my work I check medical supplies in other countries and continents. Of course I don’t have the means to buy them, but at least I can compare prices” (Rosa).

The Internet is a rich environment ideally suited to collecting information. For reasons that will not be discussed until chapter seven Bolivia does not offer the conditions to go shopping online, to actually purchase a product. However, even if the buying is not possible, the browsing experience is still valuable, providing useful information, leisure and pleasure (Rowley 2002: 370). Online window shopping is therefore an important activity in the overall Internet experience. But the women also acknowledge doing other things when they are not working or studying.

“I check the horoscope and listen to music on Youtube... mmm, but as the connection is not always good when I see videos they don’t run in a continuous way” (Ruby).

“I get up and listen to music while I check Facebook” (Vivi).

“I am very fond of listening to music, I use YouTube for that” (Rosa).

Many of them mentioned the “listening” to music as a background activity that allows them doing other things at the same time. Traditionally, radio has always been a very popular medium in Bolivia and it still has its online appreciators, such as Ana.

“I used to listen to the radio, national broadcasting. I was using the Internet because I didn’t have a radio” (Ana).

Reading the news was also a common activity related to leisure, much more common than playing games.

“I read international newspapers and local ones as well” (Olga).

“Leisure? Facebook, Twitter, Yahoo, I read the news, entertainment news, I play Facebook games, they are very relaxing” (Isa).

Either within their leisure activities or more formal ones, the women have the habit of downloading free material when possible and when they think the site is trustworthy. As most of the women are school and university teachers and students, to have access to extra online material about the subjects they are teaching or learning about provides them with the opportunity to download it and share it with the students. For them, having access to this material is vital for their professional activity.

“I get a lot of material I can share with my students” (Lila).

“I get a variety of things, I usually download music scores” (Rosa).

Download times, specific material availability or language can restrict their choices, but it is still something the women willingly do if they trust and they know about the site they are using.

“I download music, videos... but sometimes it’s impossible or I get upset because the connection is too slow for those things” (Fanny).

“In the beginning I thought the Internet was like magic, that I could look for something, get it and even transform it; but with time I realized it was not like that. There are many things to take into account when downloading material, licence, format, etc.” (Isa).

Up until now my intention has been to provide an outline of the most important and customary activities the women perform online. These activities may vary according to the women’s needs, their time availability, duties, responsibilities and other personal factors. Activities may vary in intensity and quality, but in general they give an idea of what the women are fond of doing and what they can do with the available resources.

5.5.2 ‘WHAT THEY DO NOT DO’

The fact that they did not always find what they were looking for on the Internet made me wonder about what they exactly did and did not do on the Internet, what they were not able to do for whatever reason, what they did not want to do and maybe what they wished do but did not. So the subsequent questions related to that. What they do very little or do not do at all are the following:

- Access to online libraries
- Online shopping
- Forum and online community participation (outside of Facebook)
- Creation of webpages and blogs
- Playing games and gambling
- Uploading material

The reduced participation in the above activities is due to both contextual and individual factors. In some of the activities the structural conditions and possibilities of context are more relevant, as in the cases of access to online libraries and online shopping.

Although many of the women had a job within the field of education they did not search for scientific information on online institutional databases, and the ones who did so were only using free sites. Out of the nineteen women, only two had access to an online library through the university in which they worked; only three others acknowledged using or accessing free libraries or specialized information from an academic institution. All others mentioned that they did not access libraries as those services usually required the payment of a fee, or that they were required to be members of an institution which eventually pay. Even if Olga and Emma are currently pre-grade university teachers they still do not have access to any database through institutional channels.

“No, I don’t access any library, I wouldn’t know how to do that, no idea... sometimes I go to less scientific places or Google books...” (Olga).

“Mmmm... well, sometimes I access free online libraries, but to get information from places where you need to pay, never” (Emma).

A few of the women were interested in participating in online communities or groups, but they recognized that they did not play an active role, or if they did have a role it was not very willingly.

“I belong to three different community groups in Facebook, my old school, pedagogy and music” (Nora).

“Mmm... yes, I have to participate in forums, but I am kind of obliged because it’s required at the university where I work. I belong to the group ‘connected teachers’, but it’s within Facebook...” (Lila).

Something similar happened with personal webpages and blogs. The women belonging to the first cohort had been asked to create a personal webpage and a blog but very few were keeping them updated. Both webpages and blogs had been familiar to them but very few had either before the course, and very few considered that they were going to keep them running after the exercise was over. Even the ones who were system engineers acknowledged that they had created a webpage for professional purposes a long time ago but had abandoned it after a while. A very similar situation is found in relation to blogging. They recognized that to maintain a blog is much easier but that they still needed time availability and disposition to keep it updated.

“Yes, I do have a blog... a disaster; I am the only one who reads what I write” (Lyn).

“I created a personal webpage a long time ago. I hardly ever update information there” (Sara).

As the second cohort had not been requested to create webpages or blogs yet, all acknowledged not having them, except for two who said that they used to have a

blog that they did not work on for a long time ago. Clara stated economic reasons for closing down both her webpage and blog.

“I tried to have both once, but I was just paying to keep them up. I just didn’t want to pay anymore, so now they’re offline” (Clara).

Online shopping is a more complex phenomenon and is a theme which I will not develop until the next chapter. There are basically two factors that limit this practice; the first, and the most important, is structural; the second is cultural. The first limitation is the lack of financial infrastructure and policies that facilitate online shopping. The use of credit cards is not extended, and systems such as PayPal are not yet operating in Bolivia, though in the last few years a lot of ‘domestic’ solutions have been created to stimulate online transactions.

“No, I’ve never bought anything online, I don’t have a credit card either...well, I wouldn’t know how to do it, I don’t know if can, I need to research, I’d like to...” (Cindy).

The second limitation is the fact that Bolivians are used to bargaining in a face-to-face market situation. Moreover, they are mistrustful of offline market practices. A consumer guarantee is almost non-existent and people feel the need to “try out” first what they want to buy as there is, mostly, no recourse after the purchase has been made.

“I don’t care how well the system works, even with a bank card I wouldn’t do it. I don’t trust it and I’ve never bought anything” (Mili).

Playing games online was something else which the women seldom did, moreover some of them were very assertive on the topic demonstrating that they did not play online because they had no interest whatsoever. When asked about this they stated the following:

“No, I don’t play games, my focus is on other things” (Tati).

“No, not really, I am not interested in games” (Emma).

“I never play games, no way, I don’t like them, not even Play station” (Lila).

“I never liked games, I don’t like them now, they make me nervous, why should I stress? I only want to do productive things online and offline, things that feed my spirit” (Vivi).

A couple of them mentioned that they played in the past but did not do so anymore.

“I used to play but not now, I have no time” (Lyn).

“I don’t play games now, but I used to. I noticed it is too time consuming, it was like a vice. I left it once and for all two years ago, and I chose not to play again” (Sara).

Both Lyn and Sara refer to ‘time’ as the main factor in not playing games. In other words, it is a matter of prioritization of activities; this leaves open the possibility of playing games if they were to have more free time. Bear in mind that, although it was not mentioned in their statements, they could all enjoy playing games. There was also a small group who acknowledged playing short games as a temporary distraction. Let us observe the following conversation excerpt:

Nora: *“I don’t think women are attracted to playing games, at least not me”.*

Lila: *Well, it depends on what games, I don’t like wars and those things, but the other ones, for instance with little coloured balls, I play them from time to time”.*

Nora: *But it is only a distraction, just a moment”.*

Lila: *“Exactly”.*

None of the women mentioned playing strategy games, action games or role playing games (Apperley 2006). Maybe their choices fit better in the genre of simulation games, for some of them mentioned Farmville on Facebook, and similar.

“Well, as I like music, I like to play games that are music related, especially to create new rhythms and those things” (Rosa).

“I love to play those Facebook games, especially with my family” (Beta).

An interesting piece of data from my interviews is about online gambling. The women not only had never gambled or placed bets online, but many were not even aware that this activity actually existed as an online activity. This is also related to the fact that they do not enact any kind of online economic transaction.

“Gambling?... Does it exist? I didn’t know” (Olga).

Something else which the women are not used to doing online is uploading material, especially related to professional work, although some of them did it. More common is to put photos or videos online, but only to a restricted audience. In general, they are not very ‘daring’ in this regard.

“No, I never upload photos or videos. Sometimes I am tagged, but it’s ok... or sometimes it’s something family related, only private things that my family has access to” (Ruby).

“I’ve never uploaded one single photo of mine, right now my Facebook profile doesn’t have a photo...I just think it is something private. However, sometimes I share information through Google docs or Webex with work colleagues” (Lila).

“Sometimes I upload articles within my online group of professionals” (Emma).

In short, the things that they never did, like gambling, were very few. Most of the activities mentioned in this subheading are things that they hardly ever do, but this does not mean that they ignore their existence. Personal and cultural barriers limit these activities, and motivation (either intrinsic or extrinsic) is an important element. Generally speaking, intrinsic motivation is also related to the degree of self-confidence a person has towards his/her own performance, which in turn is related to the skills and knowledge this person has developed in a specific field. This is why I was interested in knowing how the women self-evaluated their Internet skills generally, so the overview of their relationship with the Internet could be more comprehensive.

Before we go onto the topic of Internet skills, I would like to summarize point 5.5 by mentioning what the women do and do not do online shape their relationship with the Internet. This relationship tends to be very practical and pragmatic, the latter to be understood in its popular sense. The women value the Internet for its utility; it helps them to fulfill certain needs and functions. Even when they indulge in leisure activities online, these activities have to have a perceived purpose. What the women do and what they do not do is very much influenced by the possibilities of the context and to a large degree by the cultural values and traditions as well.

5.6 THEIR INTERNET SKILLS

At the beginning of this chapter a brief introduction about the women who participated in this research was presented. This introduction was meant to provide general information about who they are and what their position in society is: educated, professional women who have the economic means to access and use technology in their daily life. Then, two key points in their lifetimes were highlighted; their first access to computers and then to the Internet. This led to the conclusion that, being all ‘digital immigrants’(Prensky 2001), they had to learn their computer skills during their student years, at school or university. Then their online activities were outlined, reaching the point where we discuss their Internet

skills and see how these skills, or better, self-perceived skills, relate to what they do online and what they do not.

Asking the women about their level of Internet skills was fundamental since that would provide information about their degree of confidence and agency with the medium. My intention was not to measure what they could or could not do in relation to an ideal standard, but to get to know about their perception of themselves, which in turn would show how secure they felt towards the Internet and computer use.

Here the term skill is understood as the ability to perform specific tasks (James 2011). According to van Deursen and van Dijk (2011) understanding the technological skills of today is vital to appreciate the worldwide diffusion of technology, and therefore the digital divide. Until some years ago researchers were only concerned with access to computers, as if the major difference was marked by having or not having, and they did not focus on the importance of knowing how to use them. Measuring ‘know-how’ is certainly more complex than counting computers, or just calculating the speed of the Internet.

When I questioned the women about their skills I took into account elements that authors like Van Deursen et al (2011), Steyaert (2002) relate to basic digital skills. And so the classification proposed by van Deursen and van Dijk (2011)⁴², medium related skills, content related skills, communication skills and content creation skills was briefly explained to the women (in terms of conceptual categories), so they could discuss these elements in order to provide a self-evaluation of what they thought they were able or not able to do. But before explaining these skills, the following two answers give an idea of how the women faced the topic:

⁴² For an extensive and detailed literature on the present classification and definition of Internet skills, see: van Deursen, A. and J. van Dijk (2011). "Internet skills and the digital divide." *New Media & Society* 13(6): 893-911.

“If it wasn’t for this master course, I wouldn’t have had any skill” (laughs), (Lyn).

“I’ve developed all four skills in a very intuitive manner, but now in the course I am really learning” (Tati).

Lyn and Tati, and all the others, could not avoid making a comparison between their Internet skills before the master course and then during it. All of them had used the Internet before, but it seems that the formal learning environment gave them a greater level of confidence. Tati acknowledged having skills already, but when she says that only now she is learning, what she is doing is confirming the validity of her previous skills and enhancing their potential.

Going back to the classification of van Deursen and van Dijk (2011), medium-related skills refer to operational and formal aspects such as computer knowledge, navigation and orientation in a hypermedia environment. Content-related skills refer to the fulfillment of information needs and the strategies in using the Internet in order to reach a particular goal (decision making). Communication skills have to do with interaction abilities and peer-to-peer networking; and content creation skills deal with the creation, editing and publication of content on the net. And this is what the women said about their own skills:

“I think we are good at communication skills” (Nora).

Medium-related and communication skills are those that they are more confident about.

“I realize I still miss many things, a lot of things to learn... mmm... content creation? I know nothing” (Ruby).

“Uf!... I am not good at content creation” (Lila).

“I think I’m good at most of them, or the first three, but content creation? ... Well, first I don’t have time, I don’t produce anything. Nowadays all young

people, girls and boys, are getting the basics on computers and school, but it's not enough" (Fanny).

Interestingly, there was a relatively equal evaluation of all types of skills, regardless of whether they were professional and directly linked to ICTs or not. Most of the women recognized their weakness in content creation skills, and this is reflected in their limited online production and by the fact that they hardly ever upload personal material. However, Brisa's statement shows that maybe there is an underestimation of their content creation skill.

"I can say that my skills and others' skills are below average, however I think that in certain things like content skills, strategies to get information, I'm better than others... ...We started to learn how to create wikis, blogs, and we're a privileged group, nobody knows what Prezi is in Bolivia, but we do" (Brisa).

Even if Brisa also starts her discourse acknowledging being "below average", she also recognizes that not only herself but the whole group of women do know more than the average Bolivian. At the same time, many of them recognized that they were less skilled in dealing with "wires and hardware" than their male peers⁴³, but that they were quite good or even better at other aspects such as communication and messaging. As contradictory as it may seem this demonstrates the complexity of a self-evaluation process that is always related to different ideal standards. For instance, one of the conclusions that van Deursen and van Dijk (2011: 908) develop is that operational and formal Internet skills are not sufficient for an effective use of the Internet, a good command of all skills will be determinant for positions in labour market and socially. So, an important element is how these women position their Internet skills in relation to their

⁴³ Corneliussen, analyzing the gendered hegemonic discourses on computing, affirms that "computing is assumed to be something for women that is different than it is for men; it is a way to practice social skills... women's technicity is constructed as socially-based, different from men's technologically based technicity" (2011: 142). Therefore women in general tend to rate certain skills lower than men. Corneliussen, H. G. (2011). Gender-Technology Relations : Exploring Stability and Change. Palgrave Macmillan.

students. As the academic world is their working environment it is there where they should feel more confident.

“Maybe my students can have a bit of an advantage knowing how to use all the tools, but they cannot surpass us at the level of organizational thought, structure or even programming. Our knowledge is deeper, therefore we have an advantage over them” (Beta).

Since Beta refers to a ‘deeper knowledge’, it is important to make a distinction here between skills and competences as authors sometimes use them as interchangeable terms. However, competence is more of an umbrella term that involves knowledge, attitudes and skills. For Mohib (2010) if skills involve the knowing, the will and the power to act; competences go further; they deal with cognitive and affective resources mobilized and assembled by an individual to act effectively and legitimately in any situation. Olga actually refers to competences when talking about herself.

“My students can be skilled at playing computers games and those things, but looking for information and managing content...no way, the possibility that they know more than me is out of the question” (Olga).

Therefore, even if in terms of skills the women doubt their expertise in relation to their students, the overall competence is in their favor and they are quite conscious about it.

“Before this master I was feeling insecure in relation to my students and their technological skills, but now I realize that I shouldn’t” (Emma).

This exemplifies Steyaert’s affirmation (2002) in which he asserts that, even in situations of equal access, informacy and usage, there will still not be an egalitarian information society. He also highlights three relevant information skills extracted from previous studies; the instrumental skills (or the ability to use technology), structural skills (or the ability to handle the new formats in which information is communicated); and strategic skills (or the ability to use

information as a basis for decision making). The lack of these skills would produce both ‘technology illiteracy’ and ‘information illiteracy’ as he terms it, with the latter being “the most critical element that makes the digital divide a societal issue of extreme importance” (Steyaert 2002: 209). This demonstrates that skills are as uneven as the population itself and that there are many influencing factors such as education, personal interests, age and socio-economic status. In short, it does not matter how skills are measured, the “consensus is that proficiency matters” especially when related to specific uses which in turn “can potentially impact life chances” (Stern 2010: 31). And Inés seems to be very self-conscious about this fact.

“I’ve always been good at looking for information, at reading and writing offline, but when it comes to online I ask for the help of others, and that reduces my possibilities, right?” (Inés).

As just mentioned, many factors contribute to a technological and informational imbalance. So, when asking about skills I became very interested in the women’s English language proficiency. This is a transversal, structural skill which is sometimes underestimated in Internet studies as most researchers come from the English speaking world. I was triggered to ask about this topic when some of the women mentioned not being able to find what they looked for in the Internet.

“Sometimes I don’t find what I look for, because I don’t know how to look for it, I miss something...” (Ruby).

Even though Spanish, with around five hundred million speakers, is the second most spoken language in the world as a native language after Mandarin, on the Internet it represents only a 4.4% of online content. English, though not far from Spanish in terms of native speakers, is the Internet language par excellence in terms of content with 55,5 % of the information.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Information retrieved from w3techs.com (Web Technologies Surveys). Last seen on 10/11/2013.

“Sometimes I have looked for information in English, but I don’t have a command of it, so I use translators, I know that there is information in English that cannot be found in Spanish” (Ana).

It is difficult to evaluate how many people speak English in a given country or the level of proficiency. However the EF EPI (English Proficiency Index)⁴⁵ 2012 report rates the Latin American region as having a very low proficiency compared to the overall world performance. The explanation given for this imbalance is the importance of Spanish for most of the Americas. It is a shared language that allows trade, diplomacy and travel among many countries and this clearly lessens the demand and the motivation to learn English. Apart from this, English language education in general is weak with only a few having access to quality bilingual education, and this is the case for Bolivia and for the women interviewed; very few have a mastery of English when it comes to searching for online content.

“I usually search in Spanish, if I don’t have any other choice, I do it in English. I realized that sometimes not everything is available in Spanish.” (Emma).

“I usually find the information I look for. When I don’t, I look in English or French, because my husband knows French” (Beta).

From the women’s accounts it can be said that 90% of their searches on the Internet are in Spanish; they all find that not having English as a second language is a drawback.

“Definitely there is more information in English, but to translate it to give to our students, for instance, would be extra work, so I just search in Spanish” (Lila).

⁴⁵ Education First – English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) 2012. Second edition report available at http://www.ef.no/~media/efcom/epi/2012/full_reports/ef-epi-2012-report-master-lr-2.pdf
Last seen on 10/11/2013.

Finally, since most of the women are teachers and in contact with different publics I asked them to ponder the average Bolivian Internet skill level.

“I would give them 3 out of 10” (Nora).

“There are people who know nothing, not even to turn on a PC, however I would say they are around ten percent of the population” (Ruby).

“Not all my students have a computer, it is not easy for them, they have to go cyber-cafés” (Fanny).

The women’s responses made me reflect on the dichotomy ‘digital native’ versus ‘digital immigrant’. Prensky (2001) defines young people born within the digital age as “Digital Natives” because they are the “native speakers of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet”. In contrast, those who are not born in the digital world and adopted the new technologies later in life are called “Digital Immigrants”. Prensky poses the question of how Digital Immigrant teachers who master out of date language are going to be able to teach the new digital generations (2001: 2). However, in the women’s case the dichotomy was not very clear. The reality in Bolivia is that not all young people are natives, nor all older ones digital illiterate. The Prensky classification corresponds better to a high level of technological development, and a level at which Bolivian society has not yet arrived. There is, however, a coexistence of diverse possibilities.

“Yes, there is a generational gap, my students know a lot more about mobile phones than me, but they are self-taught, nobody has shown them how to use them” (Olga).

“One of the most important tools for the 21st century students is not the computer that we educators are trying so hard to integrate, but the cell phone that so many of our schools currently ban... cell phones have enormous capabilities these days: voice, short messaging service, graphics, user-controlled operating system, downloadables, etc.” (Prensky 2005: 37). In this regard, Prensky is very close to

the reality of developing countries where the use of mobile phones greatly surpasses computer use. However, the women involved in the study hardly ever connected to the Internet with their mobile phones, although they all used them to make and receive standard calls. The reasons for this were given in point 5.3.

It is interesting that even though all the women involved in this research use computers and the Internet on a daily basis and many have been instructed in computer use at school and institutes, some even being IT engineers, they all graded their computer and Internet skills as intermediate. They recognized that they were able to do many things on the Internet but felt that they still lacked expertise. Basically, they saw themselves as being within a learning process in which there are many skills yet to be mastered.

5.6 THE INTERNET: FROM PRODUCED OBJECT TO A PRODUCER OF CULTURE

During the second round of interviews I presented the women with a summary of what I considered had emerged in the first round. All of them agreed that their main activities, in different proportions for each individual, were information and communication related. This is not at all surprising considering the nature of Information and Communication Technologies, or ICTs. The label 'ICT' as Sørensen, Faulkner et al. affirm was introduced to public discourse to replace the term 'computers'. "It highlighted the point that computers were no longer simply computational machines but were becoming tools of both information gathering and communication" (Sørensen, Faulker et al. 2011: 17). The ever-increasing potential of the Internet and a blurring of the boundaries between information and communication functions have resulted in the growth and diversification of online activity. This range of activities can have different orientations or goals: leisure, socializing, education, research and many others. However, in the case of the women interviewed, it seems that there is a tendency towards socializing.

“Because of my work I am on the Internet all the time, but as soon as I get home in the evening I connect to the Internet again. I open Facebook, Skype and Hotmail once more” (Lila).

“Well, first of all, I use it for communication- emails, chat, catching up with friends- although the main thing is to look for information, right?” (Cindy).

Hirsh and Silverstone already in 1992 questioned if it was possible to call communication and information technologies ‘objects’. Their conclusion was an ambivalent “yes and no”; yes in the sense that these technologies need a physical support to exist, but they are more than that, they are media. The fact that they come in the form of an object transforms this object into just another of our daily commodities that we learn to appropriate and ‘domesticate’ until it becomes a part of our private and public culture. Let us go back to the part of Isa’s quotation where she refers to her present pattern of Internet access and how it has become part of her daily life.

“... I’m happy to spend more time online because of this course. Now I can, and must be, online at least eight hours a day... Actually, now I prefer to look for information on the Internet rather than watch TV.” (Isa).

Objects that have been domesticated are not seen as objects anymore, they have become part of our everyday lives, and their functionality has superseded their novelty. This happened to the radio and the TV, and is an ongoing process with computers and other related gadgets. Isa does not say that she prefers the computer over the television set; what she does is to compare the activities, for the objects have been already completely assimilated. In this sense, Mantovani calls ICTs artifacts because they are “both the objects of our activity and the medium through which our activity is performed” (2002: 310). Artifacts always pose problems of usability; the first problem is to learn how to use them, and the second problem is to understand the results of their use (ibid.: 311). We need time and experience to realize how our environment is being altered by the use of these artifacts.

“I like to browse, open and send mail, communicate, ‘google’ and search for videos, I watch videos while I iron... no, it doesn’t replace the TV. Let me explain, I don’t like to read much, so I look on the net for video reviews and material about the books I could be interested in” (Lyn).

Our environment is altered when we change our practices. For Lyn the new possibilities of the medium offer her new ways of doing old things; she is not ‘replacing’ the television, nor leaving the ironing, nor becoming interested in books all of a sudden, but transforming and adapting her abilities and interests. This demonstrates that the new technologies have become commodities that have been appropriated and inserted into our domestic culture through a process that Hirsch and Silverstone (1992) call the ‘domestication’ of technology. Having become a part of our everyday life and part of our households they share ‘biographies’ like any other object we are attached to. In other words, they not only carry messages and information, but the objects themselves have a meaning to us as their owners. Social actors are continuously negotiating the meaning of the tools and all the activities which people can perform with these tools, both professionally and personally.

“I always accessed the Internet at home, but since I have a laptop, I take it with me everywhere... well, mine is so heavy, I really fear my back will be hunched one of these days” (Brisa).

“Definitely my habits have changed, now I can’t think of myself going to any place without a computer” (Isa).

Carrying a laptop or any gadget with Internet connection surely has an impact on our physical bodies as well as the environment. The women may have some form of computer with them at all times and to access the Internet is a great temptation. They are carrying information and communication in the form of an “artifact”, and the fact that this artifact can be transformed into an amazing portal to cyberspace is very attractive. Endless amounts of information are simply a click away, but the key question lies in the ability to find, manage and interpret it.

Knowledge is only possible when the information is interpreted (Mantovani 2002: 313) and people do it mainly in relation to their interests, education, motivation and needs.

“I usually look for things that I am working on that moment, my needs, topics like pedagogy” (Nora).

“I log on to Facebook, my mail, I am interested in music, so I download music scores, also things about odontology” (Rosa).

“Most of the time I look for information, I research, the rest of the time, I check mails, then Facebook” (Tati).

Due to its communicative possibilities the Internet contributes to the development of complex social processes. Each individual participates from his or her culture and even if physical distances are overcome, the complexity of life is not. Therefore the Internet may not have a determinist impact on us, rather it can have a great reciprocal influence; it mediates our existence. Whatever the women do online reflects not only who they are but also the context they belong to. Every single line of their accounts speaks of the overall culture in which they live; let us observe some examples:

“It’s easier to talk to family and friends than to write mails, that is why I use Skype to be in contact with them” (Vivi).

When Vivi reveals her communicative preferences for keeping in contact with certain people, she may ponder practical considerations but ultimately conforms to the strong oral traditions in the culture. The following chapters will expand on this, explaining the importance of family and friends in Bolivian society.

“If there is something ‘free’ online, then I try to get that” (Lyn).

Lyn, on the other hand, is referring to a completely different topic about getting all kind of material online for free. It is also a personal choice, but one restricted

by the financial possibilities in a context where online transactions are almost nonexistent.

“Facebook is a habit, it can become an addiction; the first thing you do when you open your computer is enter to Facebook, just to browse” (Emma).

“My case is different, most of the people in my online social group are much younger than me. I only have a few friends my age, my co-workers say that Facebook is absurd, they tell me ‘what a shame you are gossiping in there’. That is what they think. Only open minded people have a Facebook account at my age...” (Isa).

Finally, Emma and Isa refer to the all-conquering Facebook phenomenon in Bolivia which is imbued with local social values, including virtues and prejudices.

Thus, the internet is not a finished project but rather a work in progress; “its meaning will continue to take new forms with time, as experience of the new medium grows and cultural norms adapted to it are negotiated among social actors” (Mantovani 2002: 320). The power of the Internet lies in its capacity to expand our experience while mirroring our lives and their relationships with the world, and thus transforming possibilities. The obvious and visible side of the experience is the object; the computers and devices with Internet technology together with the online activity. The less obvious and invisible is the meaning of those activities; their why and how, and the way they reproduce and transform our culture. To conclude, I therefore share Mantovani’s reflection on new communication technologies not being artifacts, but rather culture. As he points out, what is important and what researchers should care about is not what cyberspace is but what happens within it. So, the emphasis should be placed on trying to make online everyday practices intelligible, and that is the aim of the pages to come.

CHAPTER SIX

INTERNALIZED STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS AND CULTURAL FACTORS

Many factors can affect or influence the overall individual experience of the Internet. These factors can be macro and structural; a country's legal frame, technological infrastructure and economic situation, or can be at an individual level; digital skills, social relations, attitudes and more. Thus, the elements that constitute a given individual's experience, and which are internalized, are innumerable. However, my intention is to identify those which are the most relevant in relation to the women interviewed. In the analysis of the interviews 'economy' and 'education' emerged as being very important elements in the overall Internet experience of the women. The importance of these elements lies in the influence they exert from a macro structural level to the personal; the shaping of every individual's interests and possibilities. It is also worth noting here that the areas of 'economy' and 'education' sometimes overlapped in the women's accounts. For instance, Rosa's remark shows how these two elements relate to each other when talking about Internet use:

"What I think hinders the use of the Internet is economic resources; look at schools for instance. It's not the same when we talk about private or public schools; the former can afford teaching with computers and have Internet connection" (Rosa).

Her opinion clearly links the Internet to economy and how this can have an effect on education. 'Economy' was placed first and 'education' second when I asked them what they thought were the main factors that affected Internet use. However, they discussed education from many viewpoints when talking about the Internet. This was because, like Rosa, many of the women are teachers in schools

or universities and ‘education’ is therefore a concept in practice in their everyday lives.

The women talked about ‘economy’ and ‘education’ from two distinct perspectives; the offline world and the online world. They discussed how the offline economy affects Internet use and how the last one has an impact on education in general. But at the same time they discussed specific online experiences that related to economy and education. Therefore, in my analysis I first focus on the broad offline economic context (already outlined in point 2.2.3); then later on I combine this with a reflection on the opinions of the women about education and the Internet. In this way, I will develop two main points: the most relevant aspects discussed by the women in relation to online education and the online economic opportunities. This will be done always in reference to the women’s own accounts.

6.1 ECONOMY AND EDUCATION: LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

In relation to the access and use of technology by an individual we need to consider three factors; the overall economy of the country, the economy of a given social group, and the economy of the individual. An economy, understood as a system of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services in which wealth and capital enhance resource availability, affects and has an effect on Internet use.

Bolivia, as stated in chapter two, belongs to the group of developing countries with lower middle income and an underdeveloped industrial base. The state of Bolivia’s economy has a direct effect on the public investment used to set up technological infrastructure, which in turn affects the quality of the technological provision available to individuals. In chapter five we saw that Internet provision in Bolivia is very expensive compared to international standards. Good infrastructure which enables good Internet connectivity requires a significant amount of money and resources, money and resources which not all developing

countries are willing to invest. Moreover, the Internet is not a single technology but a “cluster of related technologies” (Kiiski and Pohjola 2002) which require a lot of investment. Therefore, and as already mentioned, differences in access quality and quantity are grounded both on the macro structural level and the individual level. The individual level implies the personal economic resources which will enable a person to own a computer or any other gadget with Internet connectivity and service. The following remarks show how economy is a crucial factor to establish a social difference among Bolivian people and how it influences technological access.

“You know what I think? In Bolivia there are differences, people are from different ‘levels’. I cannot call it class, maybe a sort of racial differentiation or discrimination, but the basic distinction, the biggest problem, is the difference in acquisitive power. That’s what I think” (Beta).

“Not only Internet access and speed are the problem, but also the economic resources. For instance, I teach in a school where parents come to me asking if their children can present their homework handwritten because they don’t have a computer at home” (Fanny).

Beta points out that the social strata in Bolivia is based mainly on economic differences, and this is corroborated by Fanny who demonstrates how difficult it is to incorporate the use of technology into education when there are no material resources present. Similar opinions on the topic are expressed by Rosa and Sara.

“Barriers for the use of the Internet in education? Economic resources obviously” (Rosa).

“Money is the problem. There are poor people in this country, many schools and universities are not sufficiently equipped, but at home, and in other places young people can have access to the Internet” (Sara).

The general health of economy and the education system of a given country are the main elements to which theorists refer when talking about the concept of a

‘digital divide’⁴⁶ especially in relation to Internet access. These factors are complemented by others such as the material possibilities in a country and which all influence the adoption of Internet technology. This adoption is a process that in turn exerts an influence on social relationships and on the general economy as well (Milner 2003). Although there are many factors that prevent a great majority of Bolivians to access and use the Internet, the state, according to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), has been making a lot of progress on the provision of telecommunications infrastructure in the last few years. It is therefore expected that sooner or later the Internet will be accessible to all and at more affordable prices. Lyn is quite optimistic in this regard.

“Well, one limitation is that here people are a bit cautious about the Internet, they don’t dare. Another problem is the economic aspect; you need money for a computer and Internet connection... however, the Internet is available on every corner at a cheap price, so this is relative” (Lyn).

Sørensen, Faulkner et al. (2011) mention access, motivation and capability as the “three key inclusion needs” in the process of the domestication of ICT.⁴⁷ While the economy is very important for determining the quality and quantity of technological access, it cannot be overemphasized that education has a key role to play in regard to the attitude, capability and skills required for using the Internet and exploiting its possibilities to the full.

“Groups with more resources can get more benefits from technology because they use it in a myriad ways. Poorer people, if they have access to the Internet, they go only into Facebook and chat...” (Ana).

It can be seen that Ana’s remark associates material resources not only to access but also to use. In 2009 Choque Aldana performed a study in Cochabamba in order to get to know how young people aged between 15 and 29 access and use the Internet. The data retrieval lasted for two years and took place in several

⁴⁶ ‘Digital divide’ was discussed in Chapter two, point 2.3.1

⁴⁷ More on the concept of ‘domestication’ can be found in Chapter five, point 5.6

educational institutions in urban Cochabamba. I relate to Choque Aldana's article throughout this section because it is very recent and the most comprehensive general quantitative study on the topic in Cochabamba; and interestingly she analyses a population sample which happens to be of the same mean age of most of the women's students and therefore my interviewees could naturally relate to this young demographic and comment accordingly. In her analysis Choque Aldana highlights an internal computer access gap depending on the socio-economic strata. According to her findings 100% of young people in the wealthiest group has a computer at home, which contrasts with 22% in the poorest group. This demonstrates that people's acquisitive power is the starting point for an unequal access to computers. However, since computers are indispensable for young people to do homework and other related study tasks, lower class girls and boys find a way to use computers at public-private places such as cyber-cafés.

Cyber-cafés are key spaces for digital inclusion and without them young people from poor families could remain literally excluded from connectivity. The workplace or schools and universities are no longer the main places where young people can access the Internet. Therefore, digital inclusion is a "private responsibility" in Bolivia (Choque Aldana 2009: 94). The internal 'access division' is also a 'quality access division' where factors such as the place of connection, the time, the cost, the equipment are important.

"All my students have Internet access, I don't think they all access from home, but they can always go to Internet cafés" (Emma).

Here, it must be pointed out that all the women involved in this research who are university teachers work at private universities. In Cochabamba there is a wide range of private universities; they vary in size, academic offer and cost. It is easier to access them if one has the money. There is only one public university in the city and it is usually oversubscribed.

An interesting datum from Choque Aldana's study is that young people without economic resources tend to use computers only on the weekends and this demonstrates that "it is still an extraordinary or special activity and not something quotidian" (2009: 96). There is also a big difference in relation to the time spent using computers or being connected to the net. Poorer people who access at public places tend to spend less time in front of a computer because they have to pay money in relation to the time that they are connected to the net.

"I noticed that my students who have a limited time access to Internet tend to make a better use of it. They are paying a high cost so they make an effort to study, while the others are just having fun" (Vivi).

Nora follows on from Vivi's line of thought when she says that the access problem is more related to interest than to money.

"People who are not interested in the Internet lack knowledge and education. Young people even without much money can go to an "Internet-café" where they can have access, if they don't do this it's because they lack education, and it is also a matter of age; older people have money, but they are not interested" (Nora).

According to Choque Aldana (2009), young people who go to 'cyber-cafés' or 'internet-cafés' say that they use computers for: study reasons, socialization and leisure. Although these three different activities are present in all socioeconomic groups, the higher strata show a more diversified use. Nonetheless, the ludic aspect seems to be more present in the lower classes. Another factor that prompts the lower classes to use cyber-cafes is the printing need. Not having computers or printers at home presents a big problem in terms of printing, and one which is only solved by the use of these public commercial places. The middle classes are the more loyal cyber-cafes customers since they use them a lot for study and other tasks. The lower classes only use computer services when in real need as the cost can be prohibitive (2009: 98). Isa and Brisa also mentioned differences in Internet use in relation to socio-economic conditions. Their opinions do not simply show a

link between having or not having, but how socio-economic conditions can influence people's interests and skills.

“Well, there are two groups, the ones who always had access to technology, and the ‘new rich’. The latter only want to show off their gadgets, they play, listen to loud music, while I see the other boys using their computers and phones to do homework, look for dictionaries, record the teacher, a more academic use” (Isa).

“There is access to technology and access to knowledge. A rich boy, for instance, will also get English language lessons and that makes a huge difference when using the Internet. I was in a Youth Summit not long ago, there you could see the differences between children coming from private and public schools” (Brisa).

Isa's and Brisa's remarks show a relation between material resources, access, education and skills. In fact, Choque Aldana refers to how “social inequality and cultural consumption differences are reproduced, redesigning symbolic frontiers that include some and exclude others” (2009: 99, my translation) in the way young people access and use computers and the Internet. The analysis between mean age and social strata shows that there is at least a difference of three years in the use of information technology; that is to say the higher classes tend to be more skilled at computer and the Internet use before than young people from lower classes. Cindy acknowledges this difference in computer skills when she refers to her students from the urban area in comparison to the ones from rural areas.

“I teach in a university where we offer distance online courses, we use Moodle, the e-learning platform as we do here. At the beginning we had many problems, it wasn't only the students who didn't know what Moodle was, but the university had to train the teachers as well. But I see that the real problem is that many people don't even know how to turn on a computer. Many of my students come from the countryside, but the

university does not care about the basic skills and that is a real problem” (Cindy).

When Cindy mentions that her students come from the “countryside”, she is implicitly making a socio-economic differentiation. People from the countryside usually have less economic resources and study or have studied at public schools which in turn affects the quality of their basic educational training. This local differentiation in knowledge and skills of diverse social groups seems to be underestimated by educational providers who allow or even reproduce these internal inequalities. The educational gap between rich and poor starts at an early age and it is reinforced and reinforces the digital gap because economic resources allow access to information and the more resources and information available offer better educational opportunities.

Choque Aldana (2009) was also interested in studying the different use of the Internet by boys and girls in Cochabamba. In general, study-related activities are the primary reason to use the Internet, then comes chatting, looking for information and e-mailing. Her findings show that girls are fonder of chatting and e-mailing while boys prefer games. Older youngsters usually spend more time on the Internet because most of them can access the net from home, while the little ones are sent to cyber-cafes and mostly play games. The older they are the less they chat and the more they use e-mail. However, playing games is the ever-present activity which is performed simultaneously or in complement with the others (2009: 112). These findings are corroborated by Isa and Lyn.

“I tell you what I see with my students, boys don’t use the Internet much for social relationships, they prefer games while girls prefer Facebook; even without the Internet, women are more sociable, right? We join together for a coffee, but men prefer football” (Isa).

“For instance, I see it in the classroom, girls go into Facebook, they are emotional, they comment, they chat with friends... boys are also into Facebook, but they don’t talk, they just ‘check’. Of course, half of the group

is doing their homework, and from the other half, girls are in Facebook and boys are playing games” (Lyn).

One of the conclusive remarks in Choque Aldana’s study is that playing games for young Bolivian people is a way to appropriate technology, develop digital skills and also a way of becoming digitally literate. Let us remember that Cindy’s students from the countryside were not even able to turn on the computer. However, not all the interviewees shared Choque Aldana’s opinion.

“Frankly, I don’t think the Internet can educate outside the school or the university. If youth in general only use the Internet as leisure and entertainment they gain nothing” (Nora).

“If you only know how to play games, you will only play games. You need to get educated into doing other things. In the academic environment you are guided, you are given rules, control, if you don’t have control, you get lost” (Mili).

So, leisure activities can help youth to become acquainted and accustomed to computers, but only specific training and overall education can trigger differentiated use and consequent benefits. Apart from that, according to Deng, Ruan et al. (2009) a proper use of the Internet in education should not only increase instructional speed, volume, flexibility, but also sensitivity and awareness of ethical and cultural matters (2009: 956). Ruby thinks that the Internet has the power to educate outside of formal settings.

“Mmm... depends on the person I guess, there are people who can self-learn, get ideas. I know people who have not been at the university and they do a lot on the Internet and when I ask them where they learnt it I am told in ‘Saint Google’” (Ruby).

Ruby is pointing out that there is always the exception to the rule in all phenomena. There are people who can be good at self-motivated learning; however, what matters is the awareness of the different possibilities. Education is

also about teacher education and Bolivia needs to develop teachers that have a deep understanding of their reality and culture (Delany-Barmann 2010: 199).

“Our role as teachers is to show or teach our students how to use the Internet in different ways. It’s more than games, Facebook and ‘monograph dot com’. The only way we can manage to make them change online habits is through education” (Nora).

Nora refers to education as a way of changing habits, which implies new motivations and introducing new possibilities and opportunities. As has been demonstrated, access implies not only the physical means, but also informacy, usage and Information skills (Steyaert 2002). Equal access does not mean equal usage since factors that influence diversity of use are not only income or level of education but what Sørensen, Faulkner et al. (2011) call the ‘motivational factor’.

“My cousin is a lawyer, he doesn’t have Internet at home, of course he can afford it, but he doesn’t want to have it installed because he doesn’t see the point, “for what?” he says. Apparently, they don’t need it, even though he has a school-age daughter. But it all depends on how strong you feel the need” (Ruby).

Ruby’s cousin does not feel the need to be connected, and therefore for him the Internet has a relative importance. It may even be important in general terms, but not relevant in his life or for his family, so therefore the daughter is not as fortunate as most of the women in this research who were motivated to computer use from an early age by their parents. For Sørensen, Faulkner et al. (2011), relevance is a situated thing: “what is highly interesting for one person maybe quite irrelevant for another”. However, many people just learn how to use technology as no choices are presented to them; they are obliged to learn because of work or education. In this regard, Sørensen, Faulker et al. understand capability as “not only the skills required to use a range of ICT applications but also the capacity to make judgments about how and when to use particular ICT for particular purposes, plus the confidence to do so” (2011: 64). In the case of

the women interviewed, they comply with all three requirements for digital inclusion; access, motivation and capability. However, they affirm that education is the key factor for learning and being confident users.

“I think education plays a major role in being able to profit from all opportunities that the Internet provides us with. There are thousands of things we can do on the net, but we don’t know enough, we need to be educated on how to use it” (Nora).

“Education is the key to diminish or improve your possibilities on the net... First, we must know how to use the tools, because it doesn’t matter if you have them, without the knowledge on how to use them, they are useless” (Ruby).

Puryear and Goodspeed (2011) agree that only education of good quality will make a significant contribution to the development of countries like Bolivia. An expansion in the quality and quantity of learning is a way to promote growth and equality and assist in the closing of all societal gaps, including the digital one. The problem with most Latin American countries is the limited amount of scientific research undertaken and the limited number of scientists (Puryear and Goodspeed 2011: 115). Within each country there is an internal educational gap that starts very early between rich and poor, and then a regional gap with a poor development of hard sciences versus soft sciences. Nevertheless, the Internet, according to my interviewees, once access problems are overcome, has the potential to improve learning and research in both formal and informal settings.

“The Internet has withdrawn that omnipotent power that the teacher used to have. If you are a student you can research on a topic in advance and you can even discuss it with the teacher. The teacher is no longer the font of all knowledge, so the student is empowered” (Lila).

However, resources like the Internet must be understood as such, as a resource with educational potential only useful when given the right circumstances. The

conversation excerpt between Brisa and Fanny shows that not only access problems need to be overcome in order to implement Internet use in education.

Brisa: "I think it is cultural, we don't use the internet for education because we are used to the fact that it has to be the teacher who 'teaches' and who guides, so it's unlikely that students will look for information for academic purposes. Some people do, but on individual basis".

Fanny: "But sometimes it's not possible, I teach internet at a school and I am told by the head of the institution not to teach too much, only how to use mail accounts, or how to open an attachment, where to search, but not everything. It can lead to students looking for inappropriate things".

In her final discussion Choque Aldana argues that it is more appropriate to talk about the digital gap in plural, since the phenomenon is multidimensional and very much related to socioeconomic conditions, gender and age. But here, without denying this assertion, it is seen that there are two other basic elements: education and cultural background, which influence and are influenced by the three former ones. And it is not only a matter of speaking about a 'global' division between poor countries and rich countries. Differences also exist within a country, and 'local' (national or regional) differences need to be addressed first if the gap is hoped to be diminished; that is why the term 'glocal', as in global-local, is borrowed to highlight all types of imbalance. The global vision, the global technological expansion, should not overlook local conditions, needs and specific development. This reminds us also that the subject of the Internet is not only about computers and networks, and that breaking down technological barriers is not enough to eliminate social issues (Deng, Ruan et al. 2009). It is important to keep in mind that local differences count as much as the global ones.

6.2 ONLINE EDUCATION: THE WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE

At the time the interviews for this research were conducted, the nineteen women were undertaking a master level course related to Education and Technology. By

the second half of 2012 the first group of students, or first cohort, was already in their second semester, while the second cohort was just taking the first months of classes. This master course was presented in blended learning modality and therefore it had large components of technology mediated instruction. Parts of the course were entirely ‘online’ because of the methodology used and the location of the teachers and other classmates who were from different Latin American countries. So the teachers’ effort was focused on making all the students work, regardless of their country of origin, as a single compact group. In order to achieve this, different technological scenarios for e-learning were used such as online platforms, blogs, forums and video conferences. Another important aspect to mention is that not only the students came from different countries, the teachers did also. Most of the teachers were from Bolivia and Colombia, but there was also another group coming from a third country outside the Latin American context (because their country had an institutional agreement within this educational project). The ‘blended learning modality’ allowed the combination of real-presence and virtual lessons, as well as individual and group tasks. So, most of the teachers were giving online lessons as well as meeting the students in class. This implied a lot of mobility effort among the teachers from the three countries involved.

E-learning is still incipient in Bolivia, although not completely unknown. I was therefore very much interested in asking the women how they experienced this learning process since most of them, being university teachers, used or will use online education tools sooner or later. Besides, their current training (unavoidably linked to their current overall Internet experience) was specifically aimed to make them skillful in online education and its different modalities. “Online education is a subset of distance education and may be referred to as online learning, e-learning or web-based learning. While distance education typically refers to all forms of teaching and learning where the student and instructor are separated geographically and temporally, the term “online” refers specifically to teaching and learning environments that employ computer mediated communication

modalities” (Finch and Jacobs 2012: 546). ‘Online education’ has many advantages such as time and cost related benefits, contact with expert instructors regardless of their physical location, opportunity of high quality professional collaboration and access flexibility, mainly (ibid.). These arguments were also confirmed by the women; however I was very much interested in specific contextualized points of view about the limitations and advantages of implementing online education in a country like Bolivia, and this is what I develop in the following pages.

6.2.1 PERCEIVED PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS OF ONLINE EDUCATION

In the first part of this chapter it was demonstrated how the women involved in this research discuss the relationship between economy, education and the Internet in general. The analysis here focuses on online education specifically and it relates to the women’s direct experience. Since they discuss their experience on the master course they report mainly from their student role, but they do not forget being teachers in their daily life as well.

As many of the interviews were conducted on the university premises where the women were taking the master course, I was able to witness some of the technical hardships they had to go through before starting a video conference or an online lesson with the teacher. When I asked them what they thought the problems and limitations of online education could be, their answers did not come as a surprise to me.

*“Not feeling at ease with online education has to do with technological problems; sometimes it takes an hour or more to establish a connection”
(Brisa).*

“The other day we were in a conference, I heard nothing, I don’t know if my classmates did or if I am deaf, thank God we have the lessons recorded in

the platform, I will have to go there again and try to listen to the lesson” (Tati).

“When there is going to be a video conference I prefer to stay at home and not go to the university because my connection at home is much faster and the video runs without problems” (Beta).

“The barriers are the technical problems; platforms require a big broadband connection that we just don’t have” (Ana).

These answers point directly to a poor and slow Internet connection. At home, as seen in Chapter five, they choose to pay for a fairly good Internet speed that on average is around 500 kbps. The university has a connection of greater capacity, but it has to be shared by all the students in the WIFI modality so its speed is greatly reduced. So, the available speed and how much a person or an institution is able to pay for the Internet service are the first problems that hinder online education. Even though all the women acknowledged that they could afford an internet connection at home, they did recognize that Internet speed is quite slow and that costs are high especially to people with less income. Therefore, from their statements it is clear that online education has to be built on a solid physical, material base that only infrastructure and economic resources can provide. However, Isa is bit more optimistic. Although she addresses material and economic limitations she acknowledges that with the existing resources online education can already be put into practice.

“If we are practical and objective it is very difficult to apply e-learning in our context, but not impossible, I started to use technology in my teaching, I don’t use platforms but I communicate with my students through Facebook. I know all my students access Facebook even though they don’t have Internet at school” (Isa).

In the second round of interviews and inquiring a bit further on the topic some other interesting elements in relation to online education came to light. The

women pointed out individual psychological elements and also culturally related factors that could hinder the application and exploitation of this kind of education. I became very interested in how cultural background could affect and have an effect on online education since education, in whatever form, is a profoundly cultural act. There is no such thing as ‘culture-free’ teaching or learning process. “Culture and education are inextricably related, so much so, in fact, that, in a sense, they ‘define’ each other” (Rogers and Wang 2009). Culture has to do with values, attitudes, cognitive and communication styles and even linguistic patterns (Pai, Adler et al. 2006). And all these aspects can be perceived in the women’s answers, especially when online education is a modality that can bring together teachers and students from different cultural contexts.

Sara: “Once the technological aspect is resolved, I think the big problem is to change the people’s mindset”.

Interviewer: Why? What would the problem be?

Sara: “Just imagine, even for us it is hard to adapt...even though we are sort of used to virtual lessons now, but you still feel the need to see the teacher, it is not easy...”.

“I think physical presence is irreplaceable, new technologies facilitate the learning process, but at some point you feel the need to be near your teacher, a palm on the shoulder... Only virtual lessons can’t work, I think there has to be a mix of both methodologies...e-learning platforms have to be really good. Sometimes I prefer video conferences so you create an environment like in a classroom.... Mmm at times e-learning platforms don’t allow visual contact and one of our teachers once kept repeating into the microphone: “anyone there? I would like to see you all, I feel alone” (Ana).

“The teacher is outside, only on the screen, he doesn’t see what we do or what we don’t... it is not the same if he was in front of me. This is my first

experience of distance learning and the truth is that I don't like online lessons much" (Nora).

Two of the three above are full time teachers (Sara being the exception); Ana is a school teacher and Nora a school and university teacher, and all their statements refer to the lack of physical contact while in an online learning environment. Proximity is thought to be highly valued in the so called 'contact cultures' like the Latin American, although there are no conclusive remarks on this regard (Mazur 1977). However, it must be taken into account that all of the women had been educated in the traditional way and this was quite a new experience for them. The women's statements reflect an early contact with online education and not the entire process. This need of physical contact or being with others could also be an individual need or a personality trait since the comment was not shared by all of them and individual differences were perceived.

"I don't see the problem, I don't miss anything, maybe it is the way I am; I only see advantages to online education, although sometimes I think lessons could be more dynamic. I don't think we should stick to traditional patterns, we have to accept changes, if we feel that face to face education is the best, then we are going backwards" (Fanny).

"I think it depends on the person, at certain moments I have managed to group coordinate and do homework in a better way using the Internet than in person. I think it is a matter of getting used to" (Clara).

Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey et al. (1996) argue that individuals within a culture learn preferences for particular forms of behaviour in particular situations (such as the expected face to face interaction in classroom education) and this produces behavioural tendencies, although there will always be individualities. But as Rogers and Wang (2009) argue the challenge of online education is to engage and design for a culturally diverse audience in terms of behaviour, practices, needs, skills, expectations and more. And since one of the characteristics of this type of education is that students can take a course offered in a different physical

location, let us say a different institution, city, country or even continent, language can represent an important element to be dealt with. However, in this specific master course the language of instruction was taken for granted. All Bolivian students were Spanish speaking; their classmates from a different Latin American country were also native Spanish speakers and the teachers coming from a third country, although non-native speakers of Spanish, were expected to command this language at certain level of proficiency. So, I never thought that the language of instruction could represent a problem until some of the women argued the following:

“Sometimes, I cannot understand, we are not used to listen to Spanish spoken in a different way” (Nora).

“Verbal communication in person is different; at least I feel it like that” (Ana).

“Technical language matters, we don’t think of it, but many of us come from different backgrounds and we use specialized words with a different sense and we should try to talk a common language” (Brisa).

There is the risky belief that sharing a common language already means mutual understanding. A common language can create a sense of community, but it doesn’t mean that the language is inclusive to all its speakers (Martin Zorraquino 2010). Oral, written, idiomatic and even specialized language differences must be taken into account. Moreover, misunderstandings due to cross-cultural interaction influence the teaching and learning process according to Rogers and Wang (2009). These authors affirm that only when we are in direct contact with another way of doing things do we begin to unravel our expectations (ibid.). So it is clear that for these women not only was the modality of online learning or e-learning quite a new experience but also the fact of sharing the process with people from other places, or even just with people of a different professional background.

6.2.2 PERCEIVED BENEFITS AND VIRTUES OF ONLINE EDUCATION

The overview of online education could have not been complete if only problems were highlighted, forgetting the advantages and virtues that this kind of education can have. Therefore, the women in this research were also asked about what they considered to be positive about using the Internet and other technologies in their study program. As stated in the previous section, here the analysis of online education is based on the women's direct experience of the master course they were taking; thus, most of their general assertions about the advantages of online education are the product of an inductive analysis from their specific experience.

"You can take the lessons when you want, wherever you want, you can have a job and follow a course at the same time..." (Ana).

"We have to evaluate what we gain and what we lose with distance education; and I think it is more what we gain. For me it doesn't make sense that I cannot study or get instruction if I am not physically present in a classroom or if I am not able to commute to an educational centre" (Fanny).

"I have always seen the relationship between education and technology, always. I think technology is a powerful tool to catch the attention of children for instance..." "I think there are tools, computers, software, etc. within our possibilities that can help to develop unsuspected abilities in us and in others. Of course you have to learn how to use these tools first.... Technology can teach you many things, patience included" (Beta).

When talking about the advantages of online education, Ana refers to time saving, Fanny to distance saving and Beta to enhanced technological skills. All these comments are particularly valuable for the Bolivian context because as Rivero Morales (2012) states it was until only a short time ago that higher education institutions exerted a 'knowledge monopoly'; people had to be part of a university or another higher education institution to be able to get specialized information,

so this knowledge was accessible only to a few fortunate ones. However, today, and in spite of the still highly unequal social configuration, the new technologies are well on their way to making information and knowledge available to all.

Another positive aspect is the cultural diversity of the subjects involved in most e-learning courses. It was noted before that this diversity could represent a problem for the mutual understanding of the participants, but this diversity, consciously assumed while working on the acknowledgement of the differences, can be the first step to develop cultural competence. As a matter of fact, one of the things that Rogers and Wang (2009) propose to make online education really enriching is the development of this ‘cultural competence’ since this kind of education tends, by its very nature, to bring together teachers and students from different backgrounds.

In addition, online education can be empowering to women in societies where women’s responsibilities are still highly attached to the family and the domestic sphere; the women are able to access education from outside of this traditional environment. No matter if the woman is single or married her family duties require her to spend much of her time at home, and often this is why she abandons the idea of undertaking pre-graduate or postgraduate studies.

“Many women wouldn’t even have the opportunity to study if it wasn’t for this kind of course. Here at least, women have a lot of home-based responsibilities and it is difficult for them to undertake normal university courses. With online education you can study with your children next to you; you would never be allowed to take them to a classroom, right? Online education gives women the possibility to get a career, or even a specialization” (Lila).

Being able to work, in other words to get an income, and to be next to the family are some of the advantages that online education can provide to adult learners. This was even corroborated by one of the male classmates attending the master course:

“I had been looking to study a master degree for many years, six or seven years, but the master courses I was offered were outside Bolivia and that meant I had to leave my wife and children behind; that is why I rejected them and accepted this opportunity now to study with this e-learning modality from Bolivia” (Enzo).

Online education, although specifically empowering to women, can benefit both men and women from different groups and to different extents. It is not only able to keep family bonds together, but it can also make people from different countries feel closer.

“With online education I realized that I can get the same training and knowledge of a person in the USA or any other country and that makes me feel great. I get the same information as other people in the rest of the world. I can also meet experts; that was impossible before and with online education you don’t need to go somewhere else to learn, you don’t need to leave your family anymore” (Tati).

Tati also admitted that before this master course she was much in favour of traditional education, but this perception changed greatly over time.

“It opens the mind and the possibilities... there are things I know, things I don’t; each person knows a bit of everything, I don’t have to feel inferior if I don’t know it all... I learned that reading others’ opinions in forums and pages like that. I think I can teach my students that there are new ways of learning too... now we have the same opportunities, it helps Bolivians to get rid of the inferiority complex, it is a form of power, right?” (Tati).

The fact that online education allows cultural exchange is one of its great virtues. Tati, who had not had the chance to study abroad or travel outside Bolivia, is just overawed by the opportunity of knowing the world virtually. Moreover, when she says “get rid of the inferiority complex” she is making an implicit comparison between what she knows and what others know. Traditionally, Bolivia has been

the least ‘developed’ country in the region and its people cannot avoid feeling ‘underdeveloped’ if compared to any foreigner. This inferiority complex, as Mansilla argues, is the result of a long historical process and it has been used as a defense tactic “against real or imaginary enemies” (2003: 74). So, a hypothesis here is that the Internet and online education can be a strategy to overcome this kind of complex and raise the self-esteem not only of a person but also a whole group or community, a sort of geographical and cultural empowerment. In the global, modern world, cultural dynamics is one of the most important issues of our time and “online learning environments have the power to better prepare all of us for operating in a global world” (Rogers and Wang 2009: 9).

6.2.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Online education does not only have the virtue of facilitating a connection among people from different places, but also a discussion and sharing of ‘global’ formal knowledge from different ‘local’ contexts. So socio-cultural global and local, or ‘glocal’, diversity does not represent a hindrance for online education as the material or economic imbalance does; on the contrary, it turns out to be a valuable asset to be exploited. However, this will only be achieved if the development of cultural competences is consciously undertaken by instructional designers.

Rogers, Graham et al. (2007) present the results of an exploratory study about the experience of a geographically diverse group of online instruction designers who work cross-culturally. This study is particularly useful here because it starts off from an educational perspective, and not from a psychological one which is traditionally the one that deals with cultural competence analysis. They argue that a more “dynamic approach is needed to account for both the complexities of the learner’s cultural predispositions as well as their individual uniqueness and ability to change” (2007: 200). Their findings present four areas in which key differences in a multicultural environment are present in relation to distance learning a) general cultural and social expectations, b) teaching and learning expectations,

c) differences in the use of language and symbols, and d) technological infrastructure and familiarity.

Even though examples for these categories have already been provided throughout this paper, here some specific examples are highlighted.

a) General cultural and social expectations

"I noticed that teachers who are not Bolivians are more respectful, they are even more polite... but I am not saying that Bolivians are rude" (Cindy).

"There was this Bolivian teacher who addressed the girls as 'princesses', some girls really disliked this... in my case? I don't care" (Emma).

Cindy and Emma clearly refer to social patterns of behaviour and what they perceive as appropriate and inappropriate. For Rogers, Graham et al. (2007) cultural and social expectations have to do with roles and relationships that influence how the whole educational process is perceived. In the examples above, female students praised the fact of being treated with "respect" while in the control group one of the male classmates mentioned that the teacher's treatment towards the students was the same in all cases, according to him they were all respectful and considerate.

Treatment and forms of addressing people are very much gendered and it seems the way 'foreign' teachers behaved towards the female students was more appreciated by them. The label 'princess' could have been flattering for some, but for most of them it had a condescending connotation that is typical from "macho" societies such as those in Latin America countries, including Bolivia. Nevertheless, given the characteristics of the empirical material there is no information here that can shed light on the perception of the other Latin-American students who were also part of the program.

b) Teaching and learning expectations

Culture plays a major role in the expectations of both teachers and learners. At the beginning of my research I had been asked why I was not conducting any

interviews with female students from other Latin American countries; one reason was the reduced number of students from other countries. So, intrigued by this fact, I asked the Program Director why there are so few non-Bolivian students, and his answer was this: *“You know, this is a joint educational program, to have the name of Bolivia on their diploma does not seem to be very attractive to them”*. His words demonstrate that individuals are making a value judgment; one which is based on the immediate association of the quality of an educational program with the prestige or reputation of a given country. Social and cultural elements are already implicit even before a course starts, and this ‘Bolivian reputation’ was also an element to take into account during the development of the learning process.

“We really struggled and were very competitive at the beginning, we put in a lot of effort. Imagine in that group we were two from each country, we had to show we could do it.... And actually, in the end, I noticed there are no differences among us” (Clara).

Clara’s statement goes back to this paper’s reflection on the inferiority complex and how this is eventually overcome and turned into a strength. This can be achieved through this multicultural educational setting that only online modality can make possible for certain people in certain places around the globe.

Although the previous statements refer to general expectations, there are also the examples of the unexpected learning situations.

“I never thought E-learning was so demanding. It demands self-study, self-research, it is more difficult, it requires a lot of willpower. Now I understand why they asked me in the interview before enrolling on the course if I am able to motivate myself, it is not easy” (Vivi).

Vivi lives in a society which is very much accustomed to group interaction where learning in traditional classrooms can imply a hundred or more students, and where teachers tend to require group work from the students in an attempt to

reduce the number of homework they have to grade. Thus, online education for students like the women involved in this research implies a new education culture: new habits, new attitudes and new forms of learning which can all be quite demanding, at least in the beginning.

c) Language and symbols

We have already mentioned how language represented a problem, even though all students shared Spanish as a common language. However, the ‘accent’ problem was overcome after some time.

“At the beginning the accent was a problem, but then we got used to it and now we understand each other” (Brisa).

Even though written language is paramount in education, the spoken word is also important, especially so when the interaction is through video conference or audio platforms. In both a pronunciation without ‘noise’ is a prerequisite for a clear understanding. There are also other contextual cultural elements that must be understood. Bolivians use distinctive Spanish language ways to address people; the formal ‘usted’ is used, which equates more or less to ‘You, Sir’, and an informal ‘tú’ which equates to a simple ‘You’. This distinction is peculiar to the Spanish language and has to do with different degrees of respect towards the person one is talking to. However, students from some other Latin American countries, even though Spanish native speakers, tend to use the formal ‘usted’ (You, Sir) in all situations, even with people who are very close such as friends or family. So, to a Bolivian student the way he/she is being addressed by his/her international classmate may seem extremely formal, while it may seem to be the opposite to the other one. This could have been one of the reasons why the women felt they were treated with more respect by the teachers who were not Bolivian.

It is not fully appreciated that English being a standard common language in an educational program is a problem for non-native speakers. In this specific master program one of the conditions for acceptance onto the course was the student’s

command of English. However, almost all the women interviewed acknowledged that their English was not so advanced and that they had to study texts in English with the help of translators. Rogers, Graham et al. (2007: 205) mention that it is common for instructors to ‘misunderstand’ the level of English that learners can handle and this has an impact on the general learning outcome.

d) Technological infrastructure and familiarity

Much has already been said about technological infrastructure, and especially related to the Bolivian economy. It has been demonstrated that there are global, local and individual differences either in access or in use of technology. However, it must be remembered that even limited technological resources can provide good educational outcomes as long as the said differences are taken into account when implementing these resources.

The four categories exemplified here were based on the cultural elements that differ among students and that were detected by the online education instructors in the study undertaken by Rogers, Graham et al. (2007). As has been demonstrated, these four categories are also present in the master course undertaken by the Bolivian women. However, even though these differences were neither directly nor consciously tackled by the program designers, some of these categories proved to be beneficial for the Bolivian students. I argue here that in a multicultural environment where different groups interact, the students with ‘historical’ low self-esteem could tend to work harder and outshine others in cases where low self-esteem is more related to material circumstances than to individual capability. Therefore, in this specific case, not only personal performance was at stake but also a group identity; they worked hard to overcome what they felt to be national discrimination, or the “invisible ethnocentric monoculturalism” that Sue (2001: 808) identifies as the strong belief in the superiority of one group’s cultural heritage.

Without questioning Finch and Jacobs’ (2012: 546) affirmation about the superior learning outcomes of online education in comparison to traditional learning

environments, the challenge here is to introduce and adapt this type of education to all kinds of didactic material and social realities especially taking cultural competences into account. The understanding of multiculturalism must not be the privilege of a few, but a competence which everyone in the world must develop where the local and global interact. The mere acceptance of the other is not enough “to communicate effectively, to act, to analyze, to learn to create, to relate and to manage one’s feelings and emotions” (Ngai 2003: 159), therefore cultural or multicultural competence must be taken as a desired learning outcome and an opportunity provided by online education.

I do not discuss in this paper other relevant elements closely related to online education, such as self-study, self-motivation, specific Internet use, learning outcomes and others. My interest was to approach the topic in a general but very much contextualized way in relation to the women’s specific online educational experience. We have seen that macro-structural factors such as technological infrastructure, the country’s economy, personal financial situation, offline education and cultural characteristics, including spoken language, are all elements which come together and influence the way the women access, use and experience the Internet. These elements need to be understood as factors that mediate all kinds of online activity, as well as factors that may limit activity, as in the case of online shopping and which we look at next.

6.3 ONLINE SHOPPING

Online shopping defined as “the use of online stores by consumers up until the transactional stage of purchasing and logistics” (Monswé, Dellaert et al. 2004: 103) is not a common practice in Bolivia. The most usual response of the women interviewed was that they had never bought anything online, and there were very few exceptions. Here I will try to analyse from their most recurrent answers what the reasons are for not engaging in this online practice.

Lunn and Suman (2008) relate the concept of online shopping behaviour to the specific concept of experience: “Experience is actually a complex

multidimensional construct that consists of direct and indirect components” (2008: 571). Direct experience refers to aspects of Internet use, such as connection time and speed; while indirect experience may be related to the amount of money the person spends or the forms of payment. However, the stated elements involved in the direct and indirect online shopping experience seem not to apply in the case of the women; the online shopping experience is reduced to the phenomenon of online window shopping. Without considering their actual possibilities of online shopping there are still some socio-cultural elements that need to be overcome before engaging in this practice. One of these factors is related to the fondness that Bolivians have for traditional face-to-face shopping, as this allows them to haggle.

“Bolivian mindset has to change, we are still very much into going to shops where you can try things before buying them. We are fond of asking for discounts, to bargain, but I don’t think this will be forever, it will change” (Sara).

Fourteen out of the nineteen women interviewed acknowledged that they never bought anything online. For them the Internet only works as a big shop window where they can browse, compare, dream of products, but never actually buy them.

“I never bought anything, but I check the pages where products are offered. For me the Internet is information, communication and interaction, but not something related to economic transactions. I just don’t find it safe. I prefer face-to-face interactions” (Ana).

“I am fond of checking online ads, car offers, houses, random offers, check the review of the products, but I never buy anything. It is not only mistrust; I need to use all my senses to buy something, not just sight. I need to touch it” (Lila).

Even though Lila states that her decision to not buy online has to do with her feeling a need to personally check the product, she mentions mistrust as one

important factor in not choosing to shop online. Ana, on the other hand, focuses on security issues. However, both of them admit to having browsed products online. Rowley (2002) explains that window shopping is a process that allows the individual to collect information about products that they might be considering buying in the future. If it takes place in a shopping mall, people can also enjoy touching or smelling, something that is not possible online as the experience is reduced to only viewing an image of the product. The Internet becomes less attractive to consumers who value social interaction while shopping (Lunn and Suman 2008), and to that must be added the perceived inability to assess product quality. Some consumers prefer just to check the information online and then actually buy the product in a local store; this means that they just perform the first stage of the online shopping experience (browsing and product search) since “the online environment is rich in information and ideally suited to support information collection analysis” (Rowley 2002: 370). Even if the purchase is not made, browsing products online can be a pleasurable experience even if people do it alone in front of a screen. The absence of the real product may not be very appealing, however there is seemingly an infinite range of choices and search tools that can take the ‘shopper’ to “unpredictable and untravelled paths” (Rowley 2002: 375).

None of the women mentioned not enjoying online window shopping, so the question remains why they do not go further and actually purchase the product. Sara already stated that there are cultural reasons for that; and Ana and Lila were more specific when they mentioned ‘mistrust’ and ‘insecurity’ as important factors. Out of the two, mistrust was the most common term used by the women to state their position regarding online shopping.

“I don’t care how well the system works, even if I had a bank card I wouldn’t do it. I don’t trust it and I’ve never bought anything” (Mili).

“I’ve never bought online, I don’t trust it. It’s very hard to make money, I save a lot and I am not planning to fall victim to scammers” (Fanny).

Mili and Fanny also demonstrate that trust and situational factors are the elements underlying attitudes towards online shopping and the real intention to shop online. “Lack of trust has been repeatedly identified as one of the most formidable barriers to people for engaging in e-commerce, involving transactions in which financial and personal information is submitted to merchants via the Internet” (Wang and Emurian 2005: 105). For Wang and Emurian e-trust is a complex concept with its own characteristics; there is a trustor and trustee relationship. There may be vulnerability (loss of money or privacy), one must perform specific actions such as providing personal information, as well as the subjective individual differences in relation to trust. For instance, Lila adopts a specific strategy to reduce the risk while shopping online, so her mistrust is overcome by her actions.

“I bought online once, from a Bolivian page that offers discounts for physical products, but I didn’t pay on the internet. I personally fear to write the number of my card and my password online. So I paid in the shop but I got the online discount. If I wanted to buy online, I would have to use an intermediary” (Lila).

In the last quotation Lila shows how she took advantage of what she thinks is more convenient with offline and online shopping. She got an online discount, but she went to collect the product in person. As a matter of fact, the most salient source of trust in a retail setting is the salesperson, where consumer trust is dependent on the salesperson’s expertise, likeability and connection with the customer. However, with online shopping this physical salesperson is replaced by help buttons and site search features, thus removing the basis of consumer trust in the shopping experience. Furthermore, online shopping also contains a level of risk. Consumers cannot physically check the quality of a product or monitor the safety and security of sending personal financial information. This condition creates a sense of powerlessness among online shoppers (Monsuwé, Dellaert et al. 2004: 114).

Wang and Emurian (2005) suggest that for a comprehensive overview of e-trust, cultural and contextual characteristics should be studied. In Bolivia, not only Internet availability, access and speed problems need to be overcome, but also certain financial services and resources need to be available to all; for instance, the use of bank cards is not extensive and cash is still the most common form used in financial transactions.

“I think that online shopping is taking off in Bolivia. I think the problem is the use of bank cards, credit cards are not widely used...” (Tati).

“We lack the means to shop online; there are no real offers with physical products or people don’t have credit cards. A credit card is an ‘exclusive’ item here but, on the other hand, the mindset is also a problem; we are used to haggling face-to-face” (Sara).

“We are asked too many things to be credit card holders; you really get bored and upset trying to get all the papers the banks ask for. Only when you really need a card you are willing to do all the things you are requested. Why should I bother with so much paperwork?” (Lyn).

However, the use of bank cards is slowly increasing and Bolivia being part of the global economy will soon provide access to services such as PayPal and other online transaction alternatives. For the time being, online shopping is rather exclusive since only people with a high income and resources tend to spend money on the Internet. Age is also a variable here; without doubt in Bolivia young people tend to use the Internet more than the older ones, but they do not earn as much. Nevertheless, and despite all the hindrances mentioned above, I was interested in knowing what the experience of the few women who did buy online had been like, and these are a couple of the responses I received.

“We found a safe way, it is a virtual debit card from my bank, only for online transactions. You just put in it the amount of money you need to buy a

product, it functions like a credit card but it works as a debit one. However, we never buy physical things, only services, software licences...” (Beta).

“Well, my husband buys with his card... We buy products but we have the advantage that we have family in the USA, so we have the products sent to my in-laws’ since they live there. It would be more expensive to have it sent to Bolivia directly” (Emma).

First of all, Beta and Emma refer once again to the availability of a bank card that is one of the basic requirements to perform an online financial transaction. Secondly, they make a differentiation between services and physical products. Services are easier to buy for the costs of mailing physical products are really high when they have to be sent to Bolivia, so the women look for other strategies to overcome this. However, my intention is not to focus on these practical issues, since I find there is something significantly more interesting to analyse in the answers given by the women who bought online. Let us see one more example.

“Yes, we used to buy online, but right now we don’t have a bank card, so we don’t. Before, we were only buying software, books, all the things you can download. Once we bought a physical thing, a projector, it was a disaster, it seemed to be a toy, we said ‘never again’” (Lyn).

If we compare the remarks of Beta, Emma and Lyn there is something that clearly needs to be highlighted; all of them use the plural ‘WE’ as a subject. The fact of buying online seems to be a delicate matter that needs to be done in a consensual way; more than one person has to take part in the decision. In all three cases the ‘we’ refers to themselves and their husbands or family members. The question I put to them as a researcher was intended to be singular, in other words I wanted to know if they as single individuals had ever bought online, but the answers I got were: “yes, we did” or, interestingly, “no, I didn’t”. In other words, a positive answer implied a collective decision, a negative answer a personal one. A first reading could indicate that they are dependent on their husbands or other people to buy online and that they cannot act completely autonomously. However, my

interpretation does not entirely square with this and there is something else that can complete this first reading. First of all, in a vulnerable society with a lack of strict laws and consumer guarantees, decisions are taken more carefully. Bolivians in general, either men or women, are imbued of general feeling of fear⁴⁸ and mistrust regarding social security, so they rely on people they know and trust to take decisions or to do things in which they could potentially lose something. However, this situation is even more evident in the case of women in relation to Internet use. This also explains why sometimes they also ask for the assistance from a third party to minimize risks or to be actually able to complete the transaction process safely.

“Well, I never really buy, I just browse pages, check prices... the truth is that my brother tried to buy a car but he has been cheated, that is why I fear it a bit. Sometimes I ask family in the US to buy something for me” (Tati).

“Well, once my friends and I asked a third person to buy a book for us because we needed it for our thesis. This person had a credit card. We don’t regret it even though we paid 120 dollars for a book that cost 35 dollars, it would have cost much more if we had to travel to another country to get it. So, it is ok, I guess” (Inés).

Bolivian society has high collective values⁴⁹ and these values are reflected in the process of Internet shopping. According to Lim, Leung et al. (2004) collectivist cultures show lower rates in Internet shopping if compared to individualist ones, the latter being more willing to assume potential risks. These authors suggest that collectivist countries where people avoid high individual uncertainty need to work at national policy level and retail level to reduce the risks. Bolivia lacks a consumer policy, and such a policy would encourage consumers to use the Internet to its full potential in all the phases of making a purchase.

⁴⁸ More about ‘fear and society’ is developed in chapter eight.

⁴⁹ More about collectivism and collectivist societies is developed in reference to family values in the next chapter. See p. 196.

“I think we are naïve only those courageous enough dare buy online, so first we see what others’ experience is like. If it is ok, we do it, if not we don’t take the risk” (Fanny).

Fanny emphasizes the ‘we’ (Bolivians as a whole) demonstrating how others’ experiences are so important in taking decisions, especially when risks are involved. So, overcoming mistrust seems to be a collective endeavour more than a personal one. A personal successful online shopping experience will lead to the possibility of repeating it and also encouraging others to do it. However, there is one more element reported by the women as being crucial to start shopping: the know-how and their perceived need to learn it.

“I’ve never bought online, but I would like to... I have a credit card, but I don’t know if I can use it online” (Cindy).

“No, I’ve never bought online, my brother always asks me to be careful. But I would like to learn how to make online payments for instance. I think you save time. I need to ask my bank how it is done” (Ruby).

“We – Bolivians- lack the knowledge of how to buy online. Lack of knowledge and mistrust contribute to not doing it, but little by little people are starting to do it. Then, however, all of a sudden you get to know about a bad experience and you are not willing to try anymore, right?” (Inés).

From their remarks it can be inferred that not only material resources or governmental consumer policies are needed, or that mistrust is only overcome by learning from others’ experiences. But personal knowledge is also needed, and this is gained only by a certain formal training and education that they feel they need in order to dare to shop online.

6.4 WORK ONLINE OPPORTUNITIES: EARNING ON THE INTERNET

“When Bolivians realize that they can make money working online, everybody will be on the Internet” (Lyn).

Lyn's remark is very indicative of the importance given in Bolivia to resources and activities that can provide work and money to people. It is worth noting here that even if most of the women have never spent a penny online (buying, paying, gambling, donating or anything else), some of them were still very interested and determined to make money with the help of the Internet. From the nineteen women interviewed, two had offered products and services online, one had an online page for promoting and selling the family business products, two had worked in e-commerce and were still looking for new opportunities, and one of them had already experienced outsourcing. The number of women interested in these activities is significant if we take into account that for most of them their primary occupation is teaching. This means that they foresee a big economic potential in the use of the Internet.

"There was a time when my husband and I were not formally working so we started to provide outsourcing, at the beginning it was hard. We did translations and transcriptions but prices kept on going down due to a lot of competition, but when we were about to close we were contacted by an engineering company in Spain. They were also going through a difficult phase, they had to fire many of their employees there, but we were still competitive. I was working with all the data they provided me and helping with the accounting and projects. It was a great period, in the end, the company closed down, but the experience was great. It showed me that it was possible to provide services, work at distance and profit from it" (Lyn).

Nowadays Lyn and her husband own an institute where people can learn computer programs and get a certificate with a Microsoft licence, but they originally started with outsourcing, or what is known as the external provision for the delivery of goods and/or services that would previously have been delivered by another enterprise. "Global outsourcing reveals many of the key features of contemporary globalization: it deals with international competitiveness in a way that underscores the growing interdependence of developed and developing countries" (Gereffi and Sturgeon 2004: 1). For developing countries, however,

outsourcing is not always as beneficial as it may seem since it can trap them into low-value activities and inhibit independent growth.

“I’ve worked in an e-commerce company, it was a great experience; I learnt a lot. This company was in need of programmers and developers. I started designing some content for eBay, camera parts and other devices were on sale but only for the US market. I learnt how to promote a product, the warehouse was in Miami, but all other services were located in Bolivia including customer service. They were not selling things in Bolivia, the target market was in other countries, we were just doing the office work because we were cheap...” (Sara).

Sara’s job was actually a piece in the market chain that had some services outsourced in Bolivia, but the actual buying and selling did not take place in the country, so offshoring in the case of Sara’s company was not an alternative. Outsourcing makes or buys specific inputs and services while offshoring moves supply of goods and services from domestic to overseas locations (Gereffi and Sturgeon 2004: 4). The global offshore outsourcing market for IT and business services has been estimated to have grown at a rate of 20% in the last few years (Oshri, Kotlarsky et al. 2009: 192). South America is emerging as an attractive destination for offshoring and offshore-outsourcing (ibid.: 195). South American Spanish-speaking countries are especially well suited to provide call centre services to the Latino community in the United States. Outsourcing not only reduces costs but gives companies penetration in new markets. However, an online economy is not only about outsourcing but also about many different business models which have to be adapted to the reality of developing countries. Clara, for instance, who together with Sara works completely outside of the field of education, was very assertive and confident about working with e-commerce although, until now, she has not been very successful.

“I got very much interested in business models, I got a PayPal account through a third person who is not Bolivian, so I can pay or get money,

however I never bought anything. I was more interested in seeing how online advertising works, I was thinking of working in something related to that on my own, but then I got a job and left the idea aside. I know other people don't have PayPal, but I have someone in the US. I got interested in e-commerce because I was looking for a job, but it is very difficult to develop a specific model, I tried to have partners, but it didn't work. I also realized a lot of money is necessary to invest. I wanted to offer an online customer-to-customer service for Bolivians living in the USA or in any other part of the world so that they could have the possibility to give presents here, but this business requires a lot of effort and patience, you have to build trust" (Clara).

The difficulties highlighted by Clara in setting up an online business have been very well summarized by Kshetri (2007) in a case study that focuses on the barriers to e-commerce in developing countries. But this author also states how necessary it is to be flexible and creative in order to adapt and manage different business models for that reality. For instance, linking expatriates with their homeland has a cultural value appeal, and that was something already identified by Clara.

Any commercial transaction is a process where the buyer and the seller are equally important, therefore the country's environment must be optimal for both of them; both are interdependent and coexistent. Thus, given the contextual conditions, being an online buyer or a seller in Bolivia implies extra effort and possible risk.

"In Bolivia we will never be able to really buy and sell unless the shops are within the country. Here we only have companies that work as intermediaries or retailers. They buy for you, they get the product for you, but you have to pay extra for their work..." (Sara).

Sara shows that the possibilities for a fluent online commercial transaction are reduced, since third parties take part in the process. If in the first world, the

Internet has given birth to online ‘infomediaries’ such as shopbots, virtual advisors, and consumer opinion platforms, in developing countries these services and others alike take place in the offline sphere, making of the e-commerce experience a hybrid one.

“We have a webpage, like an online store of our physical store, we don’t really sell there, it is more a brand image effort and we have a small market of customers who follow us there. I would say it is more a post-sale service, because we give advice about our products or answer questions about what has already been bought” (Beta).

Beta’s statement confirms that in countries like Bolivia e-commerce is more about information and image formation rather than product consumption. In developing countries online purchases are almost non-existent and e-commerce is reduced to mainly information provision. Obviously costs of adoption are high, especially when there are other immediate concerns related to the satisfaction of basic needs (Datta 2011). However, the Internet is also perceived as a means to create opportunities which in the long run can satisfy those needs.

“Once I created a page to offer accommodation to foreign tourists at home, and actually it worked. We got some persons who arrived for a summit in Cochabamba, but it was an uncertain business, there are times when you get people and others you don’t, so I started to look for a steady job and closed down the webpage” (Lila).

Lila’s current steady job is in the educational field. However, having studied economics, she had attempted to set up an online-promoted tourism business at the beginning of her working life. Therefore, online economic opportunities transform labour relations because they adhere to the concept of flexibility in time and work; self-employment, part-time work, temporary work, sub-contracting and consulting are all expanding forms of work thanks to the Internet. Lila did not fail in her attempt to sell a service online, however she abandoned the activity for a more secure and permanent job. This uncertainty avoidance is a cultural

characteristic shared by most people in developing countries; it is a shared cultural aspect like the preference for collective decisions and the respect for power positions (Datta 2011: 8). Uncertainty avoidance is a way to prevent a loss, one could lose money during an online transaction, but one risks nothing when offering a service in which one could only gain.

“I’ve never bought anything online, but I have offered products in my Facebook, clothes and that kind of stuff...” (Olga).

In countries like Bolivia people are constantly looking for new ways to create extra income and this makes their attention turn to the Internet because they realize it is a huge economic space. However, the circle of the commercial chain is broken when there is only supply and no demand; when the conditions barely work for the suppliers and are almost non-existent for the consumers.

Thus, summing up and as already mentioned in the previous subheadings, there are structural barriers for e-commerce that affect the consumer and business levels alike. According to Kshetri (2007) these barriers can be categorized into three groups: economic, sociopolitical and cognitive. On the consumer level, in the first group there are the problems of low credit card penetration, low Internet penetration and lack of purchasing power, in the second, the socio-political barrier refers mainly to the absence of an adequate legal frame for online transactions, and thirdly the cognitive barriers are related to computer illiteracy, language knowledge, unawareness of benefits and so on. All these barriers reflect an underdeveloped financial system, unavailability of ICT supporting infrastructures, preference for traditional models and risk free policies. All in all, this produces a low rate of e-commerce adoption among consumers and businesses (Kshetri 2007: 445). However, to this classification, I would add a barrier that is culturally rooted and that conditions forms of behaviour such as collective uncertainty avoidance, individual mistrust, the social aspect of offline business, usefulness perception, enjoyment and expectations. However,

paradoxically these affective factors are crucial to initiate change and to promote the adoption of e-commerce as a usual practice in the future.

“Most of the time I spend on the Internet is trying to figure out how I can work with the online commerce opportunities. So far I haven’t done much, but still it is a dream” (Clara).

Clara’s dream demonstrates that hope is an affective element in nurturing future actions and, given the appropriate structural conditions, can produce change and self-generated working opportunities for individuals who, in spite of living in societies with traditional values, understand the potential of new technologies. More about these values and the affective elements that have an effect on the women’s relationship with the Internet is developed in the chapters to come. For the time being, I just want to remark on online education and online shopping: in both activities, structural and technical conditions exert a great influence on what can be achieved, and cultural values and habits influence the attitude towards them. The result of all this is a quite distinctive experience of the Internet for these Bolivian women.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FAMILY VALUES, GENDER AND THE INTERNET

7.1 THE FAMILY OFFLINE, THE FAMILY ONLINE

Upon reading the transcription of the interviews I realized that dealing specifically with the topic of ‘family and the Internet’ was going to be an interesting and necessary path to follow. Family is transversal to many aspects of this topic, aspects such as access to the Internet, its uses, the understanding of it and even the feelings it generates. In the interviews the women frequently referred to their family, in both offline and online contexts, and often mentioning key life stages and turning points that had defined a certain kind of relationship between these women and computers and the Internet.

As already stated in chapter five, out of the nineteen women interviewed eleven were single, seven were married, and one was divorced. All the single women were childless and all the others had children; this means that just over half of them had not started a family of their own yet. However, all the singles except for one were living with family; parents, siblings or any other close relative. It is customary that single people in Bolivia only leave the parental home once they get married, or maybe not even then as the extended family living under the same roof is a standard model.

‘The Family’ was always present in all the narratives no matter the marital status or age of the women. For instance, two thirds of them had been introduced to computers because their parents had bought a PC for the family when they were little girls. In some cases they were also motivated to use computers by family members (usually the older ones irrespective of gender) to take computer lessons in private institutes in order to acquire the skills necessary to use a computer. Only a third of the women, the youngest segment (around thirty years old or

younger), had been introduced to computers at school. In the interviews kin members were continuously mentioned, so family turned out to be a recurrent theme even though the questions were not aimed specifically at eliciting family-related responses; they mentioned family when asked about fixing computer problems, playing games, chatting and other topics.

“Yes, I had Internet access long before, but my habit of being online only started when my sister travelled and I was connected all the time because I wanted to chat with her. This was the same reason why my parents started to use the Internet and got hooked to Skype, it was a bit difficult because of the time difference, but we did it” (Rosa).

When recounting their computer and Internet timelines the women often pointed out how important the role of their parents had been; when recounting how they deal with computer and technical problems they mentioned how they turn to a family member to solve the problem before thinking of any specialized technician. When asked about accessing the Internet some of the women were very conscious of the time they spend online; they were aware of “stealing” from the time they could be spending with the family. When asked about what they usually do online one of the most common answers was “keep in touch with my family and friends”.

“I am not very confident with the Internet, I don’t know all the things I can do on it yet, but, of course, there’s the family... the possibility of being in contact with friends and family has had a great influence which has prompted me to see how useful the Internet can be. I ended up having all my family and friends that I haven’t seen for ages on Facebook” (Lila).

“I had always been against opening a Facebook account, but then my curiosity got the better of me. One time I wanted to see my cousin’s photos, I wouldn’t have been able to if I hadn’t had an account... that is why I opened it” (Inés).

Family and close social network communication has been, and remains, one of the main motivations to use the Internet; indeed it is safe to say that if the Internet had not provided such an opportunity then the extent of its use would not be what it is today for these women. But why is it that the family is such a constant element when we examine almost every Internet-related topic?

The family has a special value in Bolivia; it is an institution that plays a major role and exerts a great influence upon society as no other does. Although people form part of a family due to blood, it is possible that close friends can also be considered family members. One of the basic characteristics of the family in Bolivia is its extended nature; the network of kin allowing strong bonds and frequent interaction among a large group of relatives (Galvan 2011). It is common to see grandparents, parents, children, siblings or other family members living in the same household or nearby, and frequently visiting each other. It is not stating too much to say that many individuals place the needs of the family ahead of their own concerns. There is a high degree of cooperation among all members. “Raising children is often a collective effort. As a result, respect for family members is one of the pillars of Bolivian culture. Children are often raised within a strong support network” (Galvan 2011: 59). Children, regardless of their location or environment, learn to show respect for authority and the family structure from a very early age.

Fanny, single and, as she herself says, rather serious and introvert, recognizes that she is not a very social person either offline or online, so as a consequence the people she influences and is influenced by most is her own family.

“I don’t have many friends, but I do like to be with my family... I use the Internet only for work, I am not a fan of chat... when I search on the Internet I usually look for health advice since my father suffers from a chronic disease. I sometimes also watch soap operas (laughs)... When I hear bad stories about girls being cheated online I immediately think of my nieces

and nephews. In the family, we have limited the time my little nephew has access to the Internet in order to protect him...” (Fanny).

Fanny mentions the family as the social unit she is most close to, therefore when online she also shows her constant concern and care for family members. She also relates tales of bad Internet experiences with the possible consequences that these types of experience may have on members of her family and how she has taken action in response. Stories (real or invented) about being cheated online are part of the urban imaginary, the accepted wisdom, that nourishes the concept of online fear and the family is called upon here to prevent and protect its members from any kind of vulnerability. However, the family having such a strong influence can also be detrimental to the individual, a barrier. Emma, for instance, grew up lacking self-confidence with computers. Even though her parents had bought a computer for the home, it was almost exclusively used by her brother who would not let her use it. She always had the idea that not knowing about computers meant that she would break them if she dared touch them. Yet, when she married her engineer husband, who would motivate her to use computers no matter how many mistakes she made, her attitude and skills changed completely. So, it was neither school nor university, nor a teacher nor a friend, who most influenced her relationship with technology; it was her brother who instilled the fear and her husband who helped her overcome it. It is not a coincidence that here both individuals are male, for generally boys are more motivated within Bolivian society to see technology as something more naturally related to their gender.

7.1.1 A COLLECTIVIST SOCIETY

In Bolivia, and in Latin America generally, understanding the concept of family is critical to understanding society as whole and other aspects such as economy, urbanization and even politics. The research undertaken by Carlos and Sellers shows that already by the 70s the extended family (not necessarily part of the same residential unit) was a growing area of research in the whole region. According to them the modernization that the region was going through had not

been able to break down ties of kinship. Familial networks, both nuclear and extended, were important in providing support to the individual in adapting to socio-economic and cultural environments regardless of community of residence or class standing. The modernization process was being moulded to the existing family; the process of modernization occurred and affected individuals in their networks without necessarily destroying the networks themselves (Carlos and Sellers 1972: 95).

Forty years on, even though some transformations have been taking place in the institution due mainly to the diversification of family models, the major functions of the family and its importance have remained unaltered. So, when speaking about family it is not fair to think only in terms of constitutive models, it is vital to think of the dynamics generated due to its diverse functions. Family normally provides to each individual within it his/her biological needs, provides emotional security, interpersonal affection and allows the development of individual identity tied to familiar identity since the person incorporates psychosocial and gender models linked to larger social structures (Hinojosa Gordonava 2008: 100). Family is the prototypical social relationship in a collectivist society; individual people “feel that they obviously belong together” and this emotional tie, with common goals, usually lasts for a lifetime (Triandis 1993: 160).

“Mmm... let’s say I am in a relatively calm situation, satisfied with myself I’m the kind of person who has had strong ideas passed onto me by family and society about the ideal time to get married, to have children and the profession to follow, so all those objectives were accomplished, right? Now I have a family, children and profession and I am even able to continue my studies; I don’t know if I am in the best point of my life, but I conquered all the objectives I planned” (Taty).

At least Taty accomplished all the objectives which the family, reflecting the expectations of the society as a whole, had expected her to achieve and within the expected timeframe, and maybe that is the reason why she feels proud of herself.

Mansilla (2003) argues that in Bolivia the orientation norms that guide people are hardly ever questioned; they are mostly respected and considered as something almost innate. They are internalized and have become a characteristic of a collective identity.

The structural changes undertaken in the 80s in the majority of Latin American countries resulted in a smaller state and reduced central role in social protection and the lives of the individuals. Families and social networks were lumped with the task of satisfying this need for social protection (Sunkel and ECLAC 2006). In this scenario the family is assuming new roles: helping the elderly, supporting young people struggling for emancipation and who leave the nest on average aged between 25 and 29, and supporting young single mothers (Sunkel and ECLAC 2006: 10). In all this, families maintain certain vital functions such as protection of individual members and protecting their well-being. These two functions are of great relevance in an environment with increasing levels of violence and insecurity and it is in this environment that massive incorporation of women into the labour market took place without the state generating the conditions to develop this process (Sunkel and ECLAC 2006). Therefore, families are trying to find a balance with work and home responsibilities. Women face a new dilemma; it is expected that mothers now take care of their children and at the same time provide economically, and the Internet now plays a key role in this, especially for professional women. But, let us return to how Taty introduced herself in the first chapter of this dissertation.

“I’m a university teacher and a master student, but I am also a housewife. I’m married, I have a daughter, I have a small family but it is a constant struggle to keep the family together and things in order, to have all the things in place, to be in charge of my child, my husband, etc. I live with my parents, I get a lot of help from them. My dream is to become a researcher, I want to follow in my dad’s footsteps, he has also been a teacher and a researcher...” (Taty).

The way in which work and home responsibilities are reconciled also affects the way married women access the Internet.

“I get up at 4am so I can be online, work and study and I’m on the Internet until 7am usually. In this way I don’t steal time from my little daughter and I am able to do other things during the day, my chores, my work, being with the family and going to lessons” (Taty).

“It’s a matter of finding a balance between work and family, I usually access the Internet at night, when I’m free from my child” (Ana).

It is clear that the transition to parenthood not only increases caring responsibilities but also an investment at work to build a career to obtain an income and to advance. Interdependence between individual human beings and groups is a characteristic of collectivist cultures (Triandis 2001) where bonds tend to be more obligatory than contractual.

Lyn, who is forty, mentioned that as her teenage children are now independent she is left with a feeling of loneliness and abandonment, even though she has more time for herself and the opportunity to grow professionally. But even if her children have drifted away, it seems she has developed a strategy to be close to them and guide them in life: Lyn stays in contact with them by means of what they know and what they prefer, the Internet.

“My children are all the time on the Internet, so I use the chat facility to communicate with them and get them to do their homework... .. most of the time they are on Facebook or playing games, so I oblige them to research any topic through Google and give me a report afterwards... I don’t want that they just waste their time on the Internet” (Lyn).

As mentioned earlier almost two third of the women interviewed were single. This does not necessarily imply that they are free from family responsibilities (no matter the age), only that they had comparatively more free time to be on the

Internet. Brisa, 35 single who lives with her parents and siblings, made this comment:

“Sometimes I feel guilty doing things on the Internet and not doing what my mum has asked me to do” (Brisa).

Singleness is a “discursively constructed social category, a troubled category (difficult to align oneself with)” (Reynolds and Wetherell 2003: 507) because women’s lives evolve under the powerful but often tacit set of regulations about what is appropriate or not in relation to interpersonal relationships (ibid). In Bolivia it is not common to find women over thirty still single. Therefore, most of my interviewees are clearly the exception to the rule, not only in relation to marital status, but also because all of the women are professionals and form part of the labour market. Single women, according to Reynolds and Wetherell, are faced with a difficult set of dilemmas that most of the time make them construct a concept of singleness in a very positive way, at least while singleness lasts.

“I’m sure that if I had my own family and children I wouldn’t have time to be online. I see that with my sister, as she told me once: ‘when you have children, you die’...I don’t want to die (laughs)” (Lila).

The curious thing is that Lila would bring along her sister’s children to all the interviews because she was taking care of them since her sister was too busy working; a job that produces an income that benefits not only her sister but Lila herself. Both of the women share the cost of Internet WiFi connection for the whole family even though they live in different flats albeit in the same building. It can be clearly seen here how the extended family is important, not because it shows that individuals are related to a large number of people, but because this relationship implies reciprocal support in areas ranging from the economic to that of affection.

Family represents a system of duties and obligations that also implies moral dimensions; not only the traditional values based on an ideological process of

“naturalization” such as maternal sacrifice, child obedience and the father’s responsibility are important (Jelin 1994: 20), but other more tacit ones like the capacity to cooperate and assist in private and even public spheres. For instance, the fact that many of my interviewees said that they seek technical assistance from family members or a close network is not coincidental. For Jelin (1994) both the immediate and extended family are more trustworthy than formal mechanisms. They are resources for solving everyday problems and this can clearly be seen in the following quotations.

“... my brother in law, he’s the first person I call when I have a computer problem, he is an engineer, so he tells me what to do or how to do it” (Ana).

“First, I try to solve the problem myself, if I cannot, I call my husband, then a classmate and later some technician...” (Taty).

“My husband always helps me, he didn’t study computers, but he knows a lot about them” (Emma).

“My sister, she’s studying systems engineering” (Rosa).

There are many more examples of this type of statement. Even if it is clear that the person from whom they ask for help has to have computer knowledge (usually a male figure), it is not the most relevant consideration; the person they ask must be someone they know and trust. Faulkner and Lie (2007) already mentioned after analyzing the SIGIS⁵⁰ project, how important informal learning settings are for female inclusion in ICTs and what the Bolivian women stated is a confirmation of it; they learn better in a family-oriented environment. Intimacy and trust are much more highly valued than professional skills or expertise, although individual economy is also a factor to be taken into account. As a matter of fact studies undertaken in the Latin American context reveal that not belonging to any

⁵⁰ SIGIS Strategies of Inclusion: Gender and the Information Society. Project Report: the main goal of the project was to provide analytical tools to help policy-makers, designers and relevant practitioner communities improve their efforts in getting more women integrated into the design and use of the technologies of the Information Society. Community Research and Development Information Service. CORDIS – EU. University of Edinburgh, 2004.

network or social group is associated with higher levels of insecurity and poverty (Jelin 1994: 7). Family will never charge for a service. Family is supposed to contribute to the general economy allowing members to save whenever possible. This economic responsibility has in the last few decades stimulated a phenomenon that is widely known in Latin American countries: migration. “Migration is an economic strategy that always implies family fragmentation in a more or less permanent way” according to Sunkel and ECLAC (2006: 2). These authors mention that when there is an economic crisis or when families see their income reduced, the most common strategies are to incorporate women and children into the labour market or to migrate to other countries. Migratory flows are rooted in kinship ties and family relationships (2006: 8).

7.1.2 THE MIGRATION PHENOMENON: OVERCOMING DISTANCES

In Bolivia, but especially in the area of Cochabamba, mobility and use of different geographical spaces has long characterized the people living in the region. “Migration has been a constant in their survival practices and social reproduction” (Hinojosa Gordonava 2008: 97). In this regard, migration phenomenon is not only a survival strategy but a “migratory habitus”, due to a particular “worldview” that, in this way, allows family perpetuation and social reproduction (ibid).

In the last one hundred years Cochabamba has seen a notable human exodus. Hinojosa Gordonava (2008) affirm that nowadays one out of ten Cochabambinos lives abroad. Between only 2000 and 2005 more than 80,000 people migrated to Spain mainly, representing 10% of the regional population. A new tendency in recent years has seen women outnumber men in the population statistics. However, this mobility does not necessarily mean having to start a new project from scratch as, in most cases, it means that other family members migrated previously or established social links that allow the newcomer to adapt and find a place in the new society more easily. New labour markets and demand for work is

what attracts new migrants from the rural and urban areas of Cochabamba in almost equal numbers (Hinojosa Gordonava 2008: 98).

Families affected by the migratory process find themselves with the need of recreating their communication links with the now distant family members, and basically possible through technological consumption: phone calls, mobile cellular phones and the Internet. In this context, the latter, the Internet, is increasingly important since in both the country of origin and abroad computers and adsl/wifi services are becoming available to everyone. Communication mediated by technology is the only way people and family members have to maintain bonds, keep in touch and generally overcome the issues posed by the tyranny of distance. For the migrant, the community of origin is still the main cultural reference for identity; in the new environment the migrant loses his social status and for him/her it is very important to obtain the moral support and the recognition from his/her society of origin and to demonstrate that he/she is well-established and successful in the new one (Hinojosa Gordonava 2008).

Out of the nineteen women interviewed in this research seventeen had close relatives living abroad, fifteen said that family communication and relationship was one of their main activities while using the Internet and the remaining four, although they were not fond of family communication through the Internet, would not exclude it from time to time. Curiously most of them chat, exchange mails and send other messages not only with family living abroad but also within the country. Bolivians living in a collectivist culture tend to use indirect and face-saving communication more than the individualist, such as the northern European countries. For instance, e-mailing can be less satisfying to collectivists since they do not have access to the context (gestures, eye contact, body placement, distance between bodies) (Triandis 2001: 42).

“When I got Skype installed and I was able to talk to my family in the USA, it was so emotional, I was so happy to see them face to face, see what they

were doing, they even walked with the laptop around the house and showed me around...” (Taty speaking about her best Internet experience).

“The fact of being able to see and talk with relatives I hadn’t seen for a long time was amazing, being able to know about their children, see how they live, what they are doing...it’s a worthwhile experience” (Beta).

Taty and Beta have a busy life taking care of their immediate family (their children and husband), but one which does not prevent them to still value and cherish the relationship with members of their extended family.

“I’m in contact with my brothers via internet and through them I bridge the communication gap with my parents who don’t know how to use the computer” (Mili).

Some of them made a point when they demonstrated that their interest in the Internet really became important when they started chatting with relatives living abroad. Internet use, therefore, was triggered by the need of being in touch with family members and this need is still the reason for using the Internet everyday. Ruby is the only one out of the nineteen women who lives independently and alone; and how much she still values her family can be seen from the following remark:

“There was a time when I used to chat a lot, now I am too busy, I only chat with my family. I’m a bit old fashioned and when there’s no family to chat with, I turn off the PC and read a paper or magazine” (Ruby).

Jelin stated in 1994 that in migratory processes networks provide a human and social element to the experience. Of course at that time he was referring to offline networks, but the concept can now be extended to the Internet. Networks have an instrumental value: individual migrants do not reach unknown places on their own. The type of assistance they receive varies according to the network. It is a shared strategy between those who depart and those who remain (Jelin 1994: 4); and one thing is clear from this; “the demands for physical mobility may not

weaken intimacy of contact in the kin network” (Carlos and Sellers 1972: 11) confirming that “it is necessary to recognize family as a basic protective network” (Sunkel and ECLAC 2006: 10).

It is natural for migrants to feel a sense of not belonging and identity confusion in an alien culture; that is why the dominant family culture has an important role to play. Many migrant populations, groups and individuals seek, as a response to the need for social cohesion and belonging, to assert their unique identity and cling to their roots, or to assimilate culturally, to the point of losing their original identity and language (Menziez and Davidson 2002: 43-44). It seems that the Internet, in giving to the overseas Bolivian community a precious opportunity to stay linked to the home culture as much as possible, has transformed the recognized assimilation process in the new country and reinforced the culture and traditions of origin. The migration phenomenon is not only affecting the lives of family members who migrate but also of those who remain behind; it has changed everyday communication habits prompted by increased Internet access and specific software technology that facilitates calls and video conferences to foreign countries.

“I used Skype like everybody else, but then the local phone company offered this service, virtual phone, it’s very, very cheap. They give you a number and a USB key, it’s like a local phone call, but you can make international calls and you can receive phone calls as well, I use it with my brother, we’re connected all the time” (Vivi).

Thus the communicative capacity of the Internet is often used to fill the emptiness of being disconnected and hopelessly alone in a new environment. Nevertheless the sense of belonging is not only the prerogative of the migrant but that of everybody; family remains important for us all. Family does not only provide material well-being but also determines patterns of behaviour, ideas and a construction of the world. Of course, there is an enormous diversity of family situations which result from the various tensions that relate to the daily demands

of affection, intimacy and security (Jelin 1994: 3). Interestingly, as stated at the beginning, the Internet constitutes one more domestic element to be taken into account when trying to understand family habits, situations and tensions. For example Beta, the interviewee with the most children of all the women, when asked to mention something negative about the Internet said,

“The problem when my kid is on the Internet is that I have to be with him all the time, even if I don’t have the time, as I need to be sure what he’s doing... of course, I know it is also positive because we are sharing time, but the Internet is not for kids, so I’m always wondering what he’s doing on the Internet when I’m not there” (Beta).

But Beta is the same person who admits how beneficial the Internet is for family cohesion:

“I never play online except with the family, when those first Facebook games became popular we used to sit together to play, husband, children, everybody!” (Beta).

As we have seen, understanding the role of the family is crucial to understanding how my interviewees relate to the Internet and its importance cannot be underestimated, especially in a society which is very conservative and collectivist. In Bolivia, as Mansilla puts it, “the constant exercise to protect habits and conventions in spite of the modernization process has produced a certain kind of virtuosity” (2003: 7, my translation). In his analysis⁵¹, collectivity will always be put before any individual, and that is why family as a whole, as a concept and as an institution will always have a high value attached to it. Naturally this is also true of my interviewees, the women on which this dissertation is based:

⁵¹ The innate inferiority of the citizen in front of the organization, no matter how small this one is, has its logic and justification in the ontological inferior dignity of the individual in relation to collectivity. Mansilla (2003: 54).

“We do everything so our children are in contact with the rest of the family, for the only thing that counts in life is the relationships you manage to build” (Beta).

7.2 GENDER AND THE INTERNET

Talking about gender is not an easy task. Gender has produced a lot of debate and it is a permanent topic of discussion in many disciplines. Some theoretical strands concerned with gender and related issues have already been sketched and tied together within the global label of Feminist studies in chapter four. In this present section I feel the need to discuss gender as I realize that it may be the ‘substance’ with which to glue together many of the reflections so far presented in this analysis.

Corneliussen argues that “gender is rarely visible in research unless it is explicitly defined as an important category, and by not emphasizing gender, descriptions of the world can slip through as ‘general’ and valid for all human beings” (2011: 20). In this regard, she affirms that feminism in all forms and streams has contributed to understanding how gender and technology relate, contesting the “gender blind mainstream tradition”. I share the position of Consalvo and Paasonen (2002) who say that gender matters, that gender and the Internet articulate and shape each other. However, the issue is to be able to go beyond that assertion and determine how it matters, and to do so Consalvo and Paasonen place emphasis on an analysis of the everyday use of the Internet: “The Internet has changed from a place where identities were joyfully discarded, experimented with, or reconfigured, to a medium (discussed in spatial terms) where identity seems to be a driving force for involvement, and an aspect of embodiment that few users actually want to leave behind” (Consalvo and Paasonen 2002: 4). This statement has a special relevance to me since my wish is to show how the Internet is not a cloud where disembodied beings lurk, but a place where meaningful actors confirm their identity through embodied selves.

When researchers and specialists study a phenomenon from their field of expertise, there might be a risk of over-emphasizing a specific aspect (relating to their specific area of expertise) at the expense of other elements that constitute the phenomenon. That is why I consider asking the question ‘to what extent does gender matter in the women’s experience on the Internet?’ is a ‘healthy’ question, and one that will allow me to have a balanced approach to the topic. This approach will be very similar to that taken with the other topics discussed so far; my reflections are built on the interpretation of the data collected and analyzed through the prism of different theories and theorists who have an authoritative saying on the matter. My analysis is not focused on gendering the object, in this case the Internet, although there are studies on this, such as the one from van Zoonen (2002) which questions if certain technologies can be either masculine or feminine. Nor is my intention to map and discuss all gender theories, but to lean on them whenever necessary and when useful. In this regard, I maintain that it is necessary to have a basic, initial positioning on the topic. Thus, my understanding of gender is based on the following assertions:

- Gender is the embodied experience within a social structure that involves a specific relationship of the individual with the body in the process of ‘*normally*’ becoming a man or a woman (see the meaning of ‘norm’ in the next point). “Gender concerns the way human society deals with human bodies and their continuity, and the many consequences of that ‘dealing’ in our personal lives and our collective fate”. Gender is multi-dimensional and gender patterns can differ from one culture to another, but still be ‘gender’ (Connell 2009: 11).
- The social structure that makes up gender will be understood as a regulatory⁵² *norm* in the way Butler proposes; “a norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of normalization” (2004: 41).

⁵² “Regulations operate by way of norms, they become key moments in which the ideality of the norm is reconstituted, its historicity and vulnerability temporarily put out of play” Butler, J. (2004). Undoing gender. New York, Routledge.

The norm is an intelligible mechanism, a common measure, that governs practices and actions in such a way that they come to be ‘normal’ to us. “Gender is the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes” (Butler 2004: 42). The norm says that men should be masculine and women feminine, so even if someone is outside the norm, this deviance is still working in relation to the norm. Norms are not models to be aspired to; norms provide a social power which institutionalizes intelligibility and provides coherence. The norm is not outside the individual or the social but is produced and reproduced in their embodiments.

Departing from the above premises, allow me adhere to the challenge Brophy (2010) poses when she advocates for the “modification of existing frameworks for understanding the experience of the Internet”. Brophy claims that the Internet often falls into ‘discourses of liberation’ where the potential online anonymity erases all kinds of identity and turns users into constructed disembodied subjectivities. So, I am in agreement when she affirms that the offline and the online cannot be so easily dissociated. The ‘body’, our bodies, cannot be excluded from the Internet experience. The intertwined relationship between humans and technology has to do with a complex performance of embodiment (Brophy 2010: 6). Ruby, one of the women in this research, demonstrates clearly this relationship in the following statement.

“I think men and women do different things online, but it depends on what kind of woman and what kind of man. It’s not the same to be a professional woman or a housewife; maternity also has an effect, and of course, the level of education” (Ruby).

Consalvo and Paasonen (2002: 10) summarize this idea when they claim that “one component relevant to women’s uses and interests is the underlying

importance of embodiment and the materiality of lives lived". In other words, matter matters and how it matters is related to different points in time and space. This notion is quite important and; therefore, I would like to make it both my point of departure and of arrival in this present analysis: point of departure because from the outset I place emphasis on the contextual circumstances; point of arrival because the perception of even the most inner intersubjective phenomena is only possible through our physical senses, which are part of our individual bodies which transform in time and live amid other bodies. However, I do not wish to neglect other possible angles and discursive positions that demonstrate the complexity of the relationship between women and the Internet. My interest lies in showing how different discourses on this relationship are valid, even if they may appear to be contradictory.

7.2.1 WINDS OF CHANGE

At this point I want to refer to the discursive notions of stability and change in relation to gender and technology that Corneliussen (2011) analyses. Stability refers to the perennial immutable reproduction of gender stereotypes in statements such as 'women are not good at technology while men are'; whereas change refers to the rejection of pure gender identities and the possibility of creating not only new symbolisms but also new practices. People in general (and not only in academia) take a stand on each one of these notions; in other words, they 'experience' stability or change. Let us look at some examples of stability or hegemonic discourse contained within the women's statements:

(Conversation excerpt)

Emma: "I don't know what the problem is; but women tend to have problems with computers..."

Vivi: "Yes, I agree, I think it's our fear to break things, to break computers"

Interviewer: "Men don't fear them then?"

Emma: "It's more natural for men to use computers"

It must be noted that Emma was the one who had a great fear of using computers when she was a child; she was told she could break her brother's computers but then later overcame this fear with the help of her husband. Therefore, she made it clear that males were always related to computers in her family, and this could have had a great influence on her present perceptions. For some of the women the close relationship that men have with computers and technology is just something taken for granted.

“Roles are established within a culture; they cannot be changed, nor is it something we can work on. It depends on the place you were born; raised, educated... it's something structural” (Inés).

Or even

“I think it's due to our nature, that's why men play games and women chat, those are the same things we do offline... it's according to our needs” (Olga).

Inés (30, married) and Olga (32, single) have a quite different background, interests and marital status, but still they consider, together with Emma, that gender seems to be fixed, natural and leaning on the immutability of the gender role discourse. As Butler puts it “gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized” (2004: 42). However, it is the same mechanism by which these notions can be resisted, rejected and even changed. Therefore gender being a norm must be understood as a form of action, a “collective agreement to perform” (gender) (Butler 1999: 420). This gives to gender the power of being ‘real’ since femininity and masculinity are invoked in bodily practices. Therefore, acknowledging that gender is the instituted and naturalized norm of the binary system of the categories men and women, the potential to ‘rework’ the norm lies in the embodied practices of these categories (Butler 2004: 217), and this is what provides the room for change. Transformation is what Lyn, Beta and Sara are advocating. See the following dialogue:

(Conversation excerpt)

Lyn: *"I think there's more equality now, the more the advancement of technology the better. Now women have the possibility of doing more things, faster. The tendency is to be equal...if you are a woman with access to the Internet you even have more possibilities than men".*

Beta: *"Mmm...Technology can make progress happen, but it can also hinder it... technology doesn't change gender relations, what changes gender relations is the country situation, economy, etc..."*

Sara: *"...the key question is how we use technology to change things or to keep them the way they have always been".*

The fact that Lyn and Beta are among of the oldest in the group and have children and Sara the youngest and single demonstrates that discourses about gender role transformations do not correspond to certain generations or specific types of education, but they are distributed in societal groups regardless of their distinctive characteristics. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge that the great tendency among the women in this research was a discourse towards the 'stability' idea, focusing on gender differences, albeit in a quite 'critical way'.

(Conversation excerpt)

Emma: *"Once I checked a forum on technology, of course there were more men participating than women. Men were deeper in their comments. Women are naive. I can see that difference".*

Interviewer: *"Do you think it is biological?"*

Ana: *"No, it's education, the way we are raised in Bolivia".*

The above dialogue demonstrates what Corneliussen (2011) mentions about "people we study" when she affirms they tend to stick to dominating discourses but "they also tend to adjust their individual and local stories in which gender takes on a more varied skin and where hegemonic gender norms are being

challenged” (2011: 164). Most of the women mentioned education as well as cultural factors, including social structures as the main mechanisms for change.

“Even for men who do things for the first time things are difficult, so there’s no gender difference only different education” (Emma).

It is interesting to note that Emma, who had considered gender immutability in the first instance, now acknowledges gender transformation through education. At the beginning she had placed an emphasis on the ‘natural’ relationship between computers and men, and the corresponding ‘unnatural’ and conflictive relationship between computers and women. However, her discourse shifted from ‘nature’ to ‘nurture’ throughout the interview.

Stereotypical gender views are anchored in the mainstream traditional cultural notions which are the first ones to be absorbed during the socialization process. Thus, gender works through representations of masculinity and femininity which are displayed through practice. Practices change according to the context, which is in constant transformation. The women involved in this study were very well acquainted with computers and the Internet, some of them even being professional in the IT field. This means that even they themselves were a clear example of how things are changing. When they were mentioning in a general way that ‘men are better’ they were ignoring the amount of men in Bolivia who do not access computers or use the Internet and who would consider them to be highly-skilled scientists and teachers. A couple of their male classmates said the following:

“I think women are more practical, they are faster at seeing solutions, they know how to use different tools on the Internet; the problem is when they see something new, they get sort of paralyzed... well, here in this course, they are better than us in many things...” (Gary).

“If there are differences it’s because of our society. I see my female friends who live outside Bolivia and they do many interesting and useful things. Here men are only getting entertainment from computers... there’s no

difference between men and women, the only difference is that women are more fearful sometimes” (Enzo).

As suggested by Sørensen, Faulkner et al. (2011) nowadays within the information society we should talk more about the inclusion of women rather than the exclusion of women. Their thesis is clear; instead of questioning why there are fewer women than men involved in the ICT field, they pose a challenge by getting us to think about why women might be interested in it: “inclusion therefore promises to provide better insights into what it is that makes (particular) ICTs relevant to (particular) people’s lives, and what motivates them to engage with the technology” (Sørensen, Faulkner et al. 2011: 59). The analysis of the group of women I worked with suggests that there may be many answers to that question, and most of them anchored and directly related to the specific context and culture. A culture that shapes gender differences and that shows the importance of embodied practices and where gender is understood as the ‘embodied norm’ is often linked “to the question of survival, of whether life itself will be possible” (Butler 2004: 217). But going back to the different discourses and to the unstable ‘stability’ of gender, what I want to argue here is that women in Bolivia (probably all over the world) are living a process of transition where dominant discourses are being challenged.

Nevertheless, discourses regarding gender and ICTs are not the only ones prone to suffer transformations; the nature and the possibilities of the ICTs themselves can transform as well. For instance, in relation to the Internet, Waskul (2005) affirms that due to its very nature, the cyber-world dislocates spaces and places, providing the medium with “*liminal qualities*”⁵³ since we are all just a few mouse-clicks away from endless potentials for utter transformation: every one can be anyone; everybody can be anybody; every thing can be anything; everywhere

⁵³ Waskul refers to the work of the Victor Turner (1969, 1969) to develop the idea of liminality or ‘threshold’: “liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonials... [T]heir ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols...” as cited in Waskul, D. D. (2005). “Ekstasis and the internet: liminality and computer-mediated communication.” *New Media & Society* 7(1): 47-63.

is anywhere” (Waskul 2005: 56-57) and some of the women subscribed to this idea:

“Online nobody sees you, nobody cares about you...The Internet makes all of us equal, you can be whoever you want online” (Clara)

“Of course gender is invisible on the Internet” (Fanny)

These couple of comments were sporadic since the main body of the women’s statements referred to a quite opposite concept; the idea that you never leave the offline ground to dissolve into an identity-less being while online. The interpretation that the Internet can lead to disembodied, multiple cyber-selves, or as Waskul puts it: “the dislocating and disembodying characteristics of the medium” (2005: 55) poses the challenge that the self and society must be made to exist together or “reconstituted in (an) instant of fusion” (2005: 52). I see this reconstitution as the unavoidable need to re-embody the self to be part of this new environment. As a matter of fact, “embodied lives, identities and material circumstances of users are significant in affecting patterns of access to and use of the Internet” (Hardey 2002: 581). In the following statements it can be seen how women recognize themselves not only as ‘beings’ but as ‘gendered bodily beings’ when online.

“In my case, yes, I’m aware that I should have certain limits, for instance the type of photos I’m going to upload, they shouldn’t be provocative, or I tend to delete the photos where I see myself as ugly. Also the way I express myself, it mustn’t be rude because I’m a lady...” (Sara).

“Sometimes I feel that people on the Internet behave with me in a different way than what they would do offline, but I don’t know if they’re like that because of the online environment or just because I’m a woman” (Ana).

“Online I have a nickname that seems to be masculine and I get all kind of proposals from girls, so, no matter if online or offline, we live our gender regardless of context” (Brisa).

The reconstitution of the self makes it impossible for an absence of the self, even when there are people who would like to ‘play’ the game of being a ‘different person’ online which entails the existence of a self who in his/her liminality needs a body of reference to exist. Sara, Ana and Brisa give several examples that show that online they are ‘gendered’, they are ‘women’ and in being a woman they cannot neglect the significance of their female body even if the categories ‘man’ and ‘woman’ encompass a great variety of men and women with a great variety of masculine and feminine connoted identities (Sørensen, Faulkner et al. 2011: 27).

7.2.2 BODY MATTERS

Corporeal feminism argues that gender/sex theory should take as a basic premise “the specificity of bodies and sexual difference rather than remaining stuck in the socio-culturally constructed aspects of gender” (Lykke 2010: 110). My position in this regard is that since gender has been conceptualized here as the embodied experience that produces and/or reproduces a regulatory norm within a social structure, and this entails a lot of complexity, it is up to the researcher’s study goals and data outcomes to emphasize one or several elements of that complexity. Therefore, my choice is to give an emphasis to the ‘embodied experience’ and to demonstrate how a woman’s body as the performer of certain social roles is an important element to consider in the Internet experience. This is not aimed at discussing the stability or instability of gender discourses in a given society, it will just show the confirmation of both possibilities.

Connell (2009) refers to gender as relationships, boundaries, practices, identities and images that are actively created in social processes which respond to specific historical circumstances; therefore women’s roles and the way they live, or in Butler’s terms, perform their femininity is very much anchored in the specificity of the context, and which is mirrored online.

“I think men are more on the Internet because they have more time, they have more time because we, women give that time to them. Since we work

for them, we make their lives easier, we support them, we wash the dishes while they are at the computer, that is machismo” (Clara).

“Men and women do different things while online. In Bolivia we live with the “macho stigma”, women do things online that show their submission to men, they look for fashion, cooking, etc. I don’t think a man would just go online to look for a recipe, women do that because their place is in the kitchen. Women who say they are not like that or think that women rule, they are denying their reality” (Brisa).

In both cases, Clara and Brisa, who are still both single, are referring to “machismo”, a patriarchal structure that is typical for most Latin American countries and quite evident in the society in Bolivia. Machismo is a vivid experience that pertains to male and female attitudes, behaviours, values and practices within a social structure determined by men’s dominance and control.⁵⁴ According to Clara, this ‘offline’ phenomenon affects access to the Internet and specifically the amount of time women can be online. Brisa relates machismo to the uses and the activities women perform online. Therefore, differences of access and use can be linked to gender practices which are connected to gender roles.

Expectations about masculinity and femininity are also influenced by the gender discourse in a particular society; thus individual narratives “correspond more or less closely to prevailing discourses on gender” (Dorer 2002: 77). What matters in gender differentiation is not only related to historical and social structures, but also to concrete situations in which gendered norm is affirmed such as people’s technological involvement in everyday practice (ibid.: 78). In this way, social

⁵⁴ Even if machismo is associated with the concept of ‘patriarchy’, machismo lacks of an objective operational definition (Mirande, 1997). For Lopez (2009) the uniqueness of machismo in the Latino community is the acceptance of the pretension that the man is actually in charge. Taking into account the complexity of this term and all the debate it can produce, the point here is to understand that “the question remains of how useful the notion of patriarchy is [and one could say machismo in this case] when it is so difficult to operationalize in research on gender-technology relations” Grint, K. and R. Gill (1995). The Gender-technology relation: contemporary theory and research. London, Taylor & Francis.

discourses, individual subjectivity and practices all combine to form the online gendered experience.

“Femininity can be seen in the way we write, how we develop our sites” (Tati).

“Whatever you do online reflects your femininity” (Lyn).

“You continue being a woman on the Internet, you’re not going to express yourself differently, we have our own way to express and to show our femininity” (Emma).

“Once I uploaded a photo where I looked thoughtful, and I immediately got answers like: ‘waiting for your prince?’ I got pissed off with those remarks; it seems women cannot exist without a man next to them!” (Brisa).

The symbolic representations of the gender system on the Internet are also based in the cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity and in the practices of gendered roles. These roles are assumed by real bodies who perform actions, women have bodies, and as Alaimo and Hekman state “we need a way to talk about these bodies and the materiality they inhabit. Focusing exclusively on representations, ideology, and discourse excludes lived experience, corporeal practice, and biological substance from consideration” (2008: 4). Here I want to introduce some of the aspects I will be reflecting on in the next chapter with regard to feelings and emotions and to make visible the relationship between the latter and corporeal moorings. For instance, these are a couple of responses the women gave when asked if they had ever gone through a bad situation while on the Internet.

“A bad experience? Yes, I have been menaced. It happened when I tried to chat with new people, of course I immediately closed the account... It was in a chat room, it seemed the person knew me, I don’t know, but it was clear he/she wanted to bother me, it was creepy” (Ana).

“On the Internet you can do many things, get information, interact... but dealing with money? I don’t feel secure with it, I prefer interpersonal contact for that” (Rosa).

When Ana refers to being ‘menaced’ actually what she implies is a fear of possible physical consequences; and this fear is heightened when she suspects that the person online is someone who actually knows her. So it is impossible for her to not be aware of the body even though it is not being affected at the moment of the chat.

When Rosa refers to ‘interpersonal contact’ she is making it clear how corporeal absence matters when online; it is like saying ‘corporeal presence’ provides more security for certain things especially if money is involved. Tati even relates being on Facebook to a possible negative ‘bodily’ consequence (kidnapping):

“I think it’s our idiosyncrasy, we fear the Internet because there are only bad things there, like if you are in Facebook you are going to be kidnapped, and as we expect the worst we don’t want to go there” (Tati).

As will be seen in the next chapter, fear is a future-oriented emotion. Any future consequences are, in a way, ‘future embodied’, and everything is part of a whole, the offline–online continuum and physical presence and absence, and body consciousness will always be a gendered phenomenon.

“I don’t think being a man or woman makes a difference online, no matter the gender, we have to take care, right? Mmm... But, obviously I’m a woman, I’m more cautious than them, I don’t accept people on Skype or Facebook... why should I get into problems?” (Lyn).

On first analysis Lyn states that there are no gender differences when online, but then she says “obviously I am woman” implying that she has to take care and avoid problems which are related to ideas of ‘vulnerability’ and ‘weakness’, and which are related to characteristics of the female body and not mental ones.

'Female bodies' usually work at home; it is usual to see a female body performing and taking care of the family chores. If male embodiment performs in the social and public arena, then female embodiment reigns in the private (Witz 2000). Ana is a teacher, a student and a housewife. So, for her, accessing the Internet outside the home is less stressful than at home, the home represents some unavoidable duties to be put before any indulging in Internet activity:

"If I'm not online at the university, I'm usually online only at night when I'm free of the household chores and my child" (Ana).

Being busy inside and outside the home can limit Internet use; however, sometimes the problem is the solution as well. The Internet can assist women in doing many activities while at home, saving them time and from the hassle of going out. Many of the women referred to how the use of the Internet helped them in their everyday duties; paying bills, getting information, etc. This allows them to work from home, study from home, socialize from home, and much more.

"The Internet makes things easier, it facilitates your life, you don't need to go out anymore, you can do many more things just at home" (Lila).

For Lila the Internet clearly contributes to a sense of wellbeing and part of this feeling of satisfaction has an 'instrumental' origin. Women can do many things on the Internet with less bodily effort; they can do more and get less tired, which in turn can produce an emotional gratification, and this shows "how pervasive mind/body dualism is" (Marshall 1996: 261). Many of the women also related Internet use satisfaction when they were referring to the possibility of keeping in touch, to see and talk with family members and friends. Let us remember what Beta said about contacting her family on the Internet:

"The fact of being able to see and talk with relatives I haven't seen for a long time was amazing..." (Beta).

Even though there is no physical presence, the virtual meeting makes recognition at a bodily level possible. It represents the creation and recreation of embodied selves by and in social interaction, and which takes place around corporeal action (Marshall 1996). In the case of the Internet this turns out to be a virtual corporeal action and something that does not diminish the corporeal value as such. The Internet is not perceived as something that disembodies; on the contrary, it may represent a way to look for different embodiments.

“In the future I’d like to give online distance lessons; that’d be a way to be connected with other people and places...” (Brisa).

Brisa looks for the possibility of bridging spaces and not to hang around in a virtual cloud where people lose their identity; on the contrary, she considers that the Internet can provide her with the opportunity to link and put together bodies and materiality that would have only remained in her imagination without the Internet.

“I don’t see any activity that can be separated from technology, whatever I’ll do in the future will be related to the Internet...” (Lyn).

Lyn’s expectations take bodily presence as a prerequisite for accomplishment. Emotions can hinder or prompt Internet use, most of the time they are a result of the context and the direct relation of the self and the online activity; in both cases bodily perceptions, needs and possibilities are constantly present and impossible to separate from the Internet experience as a whole.

7.2.3 OFFLINE BODIES AND THE INTERNET

As discussed earlier, discourses on gender tend to follow a rather stable mainstream but do embrace discourses of resistance and change at their core which can twist the mainstream and produce permanent transformations in the long run.

Lykke who presents a comprehensive review of the main feminist theories that have had strong political and academic influence over recent decades, affirms that gender constructionists established socio-cultural gender as an area of knowledge independent of biological sex and that deconstructionists also show a sort of continuity in this regard as they focus on socioculturally changing and changeable gender leaving biological sex critically undertheorized (Lykke 2010: 97-107). However Butler's notion that gender is performative implies the formation of identities through the action of embodied agents. But performativity is not only a gender prerogative, technology is also performative; this means that people and technologies are 'done' rather than 'are' (Sørensen, Faulkner et al. 2011: 61).

Bodies participate in the social process "through their capacities, development and needs, through the friction of their recalcitrance, and through the directions set by their pleasures and skills. Bodies must be seen as sharing in social agency, in generating and shaping courses of social conduct" (Connell 2009: 57). Thus, social structure accommodates gender order and it is within this order that the biological base constitutes an arena where the social happens. Therefore, practice affects and is affected by gender roles.

"When you're single the use of the Internet is different. Now I check health pages, children's pages. I try to get my husband interested in those things too, but I'm more into it!" (Ana).

For most of the women a big change in Internet use is marked by the advent of maternity. They acknowledged that being single or married without children did not make a big difference; however everything changed as soon as they had children. The transition from 'woman' to 'woman and mother' made them change their interests, needs and time availability, and which also produced a change in Internet use. However, single women also have their offline gender duties that must be undertaken.

(Conversation excerpt)

Brisa: *“The Internet makes ‘women’s tasks’ easier. Before it was hard to find information, now, if you have a doubt, any doubt, such as how to get rid of wine stains from your clothes, you can find a number of solutions online”.*

Fanny: *“Yes, but on condition you know how to use the internet”.*

Inés: *“Internet doesn’t give more work to women, it makes things easier at home and at work”.*

The idea of ‘domesticating’ a new technology into our everyday life involves certain practices and skills. People have to be motivated, they must see a clear relevance or benefit from their use (Sørensen, Faulkner et al. 2011: 25). If the Internet helps women to better accomplish their tasks, self-inclusion within the use of the new technology will come in a ‘natural’, smooth way, which then might help to change the hegemonic discourse that says men are naturally skilled at technology.

“The Internet helps me as a woman, as a person. If I get sick, if my children get sick, it helps me to be a mother... ...My husband has the possibility to look for the same things, but women are actually the ones who do those things” (Beta).

“The Internet helps me in my daily routine, to pay the bills, pay taxes; before I needed to commute for those things, it makes my life easier” (Tati).

“Self-inclusion is the process through which a user explores a site and learns the knowledge and skills needed to access the content” (Sørensen, Faulkner et al. 2011: 97), it has to do with the relevance of the content to users and the motivation this creates to go online. With self-inclusive strategies women are able to transcend stereotypes. The paradox here is that even if the stereotyped and hegemonic discourse on women’s skills and competences in computers and the Internet is constantly challenged by the ever-growing number of skilled female

users, the stereotyped gender roles implied in being a man or a woman and their embodied practices tend to remain stable, producing in turn, a stereotyped differentiated Internet use.

“There’s a difference between what men and women do on the Internet, there shouldn’t be, but there is. We look for other things, forums, etc... why? Because we are more sensitive, we care about details, but I think in the end, it’s a cultural thing” (Rosa).

Rosa verbalizes the idea of difference based on emotional and cultural characteristics which are based on attributions given to gender. It is as if subjects are sorted into “male” and “female” by common sense social judgments (Connell 2002: 33). Since “symbols, identities and practices are intimately interwoven and (to some degree at least) mutually reinforcing in social life” (Sørensen, Faulkner et al. 2011: 108), the Internet constitutes one more arena where they are reproduced.

“There are differences, most boys look for games and pornography, women look for things that assist them in their duties as women, mothers, family, wives, they want to grow, not only be entertained” (Vivi).

“I think that in Bolivia women use the Internet as an emotional tool, not for information or education, even the information they get is just to use it on Facebook...” (Brisa).

Vivi thinks of the Internet as an ‘aide’, an assistant for women’s duties, and Brisa, even if she mentions emotions, also describes the Internet as a tool. Interestingly, tools are not useful if there are no bodies to use them. The instrumentalization of the Internet, the fact that the Internet is lived as a tool, is usually more evident in women’s accounts than in men’s; it is part of a stereotypical gendered discourse in which computers are toys for boys, while they are tools for girls, and this is an assumption constantly reinforced by cultural symbolisms. There is even a certain pride in this clear differentiation:

“The woman does not use the Internet unless she gets benefits; she uses it because she needs something. Men instead can just be there wasting their time” (Inés).

“I see it like this: women have to be productive, my grandmothers, my aunts, all of them are doing something else while watching TV, for instance, and it’s the same on the Internet, we’re not there just to be there wasting our time, we have to do something useful” (Lyn).

Pleasure in technology should not be only a male prerogative if a complete women’s digital inclusion is desired (Sørensen, Faulkner et al. 2011: 125). The winds of change are bringing us new notions on how computers are regarded; they can be tools and toys for women as well. Gender diversity must be taken into account even when talking about pleasurable online activities.

“When it comes to how they spend their leisure time, men and women are different on the Internet. Women usually relax chatting, sharing messages and socializing while men, being less talkative, prefer to play. But when working and researching we do the same, I guess” (Tati).

Here the idea that the domestication of ICTs for fun has turned the phenomenon of the computer from an object of desire into an instrument to do desirable things (Sørensen, Faulkner et al. 2011: 126) explains very well the transformations and the meanings of a gendered differentiated Internet use very well.

“I think girls are much more social on the Internet; I’m not only speaking about me, I see it in my students, and my classmates... boys use the Internet as a tool to do things, but not for socializing” (Beta).

Beta’s remark turns the tool-toy idea on its head. She relates the tool to men while leaving room for women’s entertainment. However, the way women use the toy has to do with female characteristics and the way women usually have fun or play. Sørensen, Faulkner et al. (2011) refer to the “communication turn” as the idea that the use of women’s communication skills in the appropriation

of ICT has enabled greater inclusion, and in doing so the use of technology may change while gender concept constants remain.

7.2.4 ONLINE WOMANHOOD

The internet can be thought of as a place, a space; and as such, it needs to be 'inhabited'. Bodies and matter are called on to inhabit somewhere. "Culture does not displace or replace nature, but neither do things exist outside of culture. Phenomena are material-cultural be-in's" (Barad 1996: 181) and the Internet is just one more of those phenomena. In a phenomenon, matter and meaning meet (ibid.: 185).

"I'm always a woman, online and offline...I never think that on the Internet I'm something else or someone different, I am who I am all the time" (Olga).

Like in the laws of physics, Olga does not extinguish herself while online, she only adapts herself to the new environment. She could never leave her embodied self, the moment she did that, she wouldn't exist anymore. It is through her body that her being has significance. The body is always there, it intervenes in discourses as discourses can intervene in bodies (Somerville 2004), and there are as many possible discourses as there are practices which can be performed, either online or offline, reflecting multiple patterns of masculinity and femininity.

"Men behave differently online towards a woman than when offline. Face-to-face they are more shy, online they are more daring, at least that happened to me" (Inés).

"I don't think men and women behave differently online" (Nora).

"I feel that on the Internet I'm more respected, or maybe it's just the kind of people I relate to" (Mili).

The last three statements reflect three different possibilities or experiences. Inés says that men are more daring with her while online, Nora does not perceive any difference, and Mili thinks she is even more respected. In other words, negative, neutral and positive experiences with the opposite sex are all possible. This means that an online modification of gender relations may occur or be experienced, proving that the people's agency is constantly re-creating gender identity. Even if the body is not physically present when online, the idea of a possible body is always there.

"... when you chat with a man with whom you don't have a close relation offline, he loses his shyness and start flirting in a grotesque way, ill-mannered" (Lila).

The man loses his shyness in part because there is no physical presence, but also because the woman's possible body enhances his boldness. In this sense, bodies are not thought of objects, but as events that are continually in the process of becoming (Budgeon 2003).

For Emma, not having to deal with her physical body online gives her more possibilities to experience her own self.

"On the Internet I have more freedom, I feel free. While offline, being a woman means to have limits, having children or not, being sexually harassed, but on the Internet you have more control of yourself" (Emma).

The online world, like the offline one, is a fertile ground for contradictions and complexities. We just saw how certain online activities are avoided because they could be a potential risk for the physical body in the offline world, they could have a bodily consequence afterwards and this causes anxiety and fear. However, Emma shows us a different perspective; for her the Internet is safer. While online the physical body is not in danger and she has more control of the self and her actions. For Budgeon (2003), bringing materiality to the forefront of analysis can provide better insights into people's subjectivity. She thinks that a focus on body

enactments and connections brings more to the analysis than just body meanings. Agency is not something one has, but something one is (Barad 1996), and our agency is shaped by many boundaries, physical, mental, technical, cultural and discursive.

“Sometimes in a forum your opinion is not taken into account because they see a woman’s name” (Nora).

“Well, in a way the fact of being anonymous on the Internet can be beneficial to women because many times when it’s known that the opinion comes from a woman this opinion is undervalued” (Ruby).

If we look solely at the above remarks one could think that the Internet perpetuates the constraints for women’s agency; however, that is only one side of the phenomenon.

“Feminist activism is more intense online than offline, I know more feminists online” (Beta).

It is not possible to take reductionist positions and draw conclusions about women and the Internet. People, either men or women, experience the Internet with the wholeness of their being: their body, mind, emotions and circumstances are all engaged. People perform online within the limits of their agency, an agency which is shaped, not by the gender they have, but by the gender they live.

7.3 FROM THE OUTSIDE INWARDS

In chapter four, I discuss how different feminist positions (specifically phenomenology and poststructuralism) understand experience; and in the end, I advocate that these distinct positions could complement each other instead of focusing on unfruitful opposition. I finish that chapter with Hekman’s (2008) reflection on what she considers the ‘new settlements’ or the birth of a new paradigm in science where language, materiality and technology come into the equation. In my analysis of gender and the Internet I place an emphasis on

materiality and embodiment since an existential body is the prerequisite for our capacity to experience. Bodies are not neutral, they are charged with meaning and therefore bodily change may transform what is experienced; “if our bodies change over time, then the world around us will create different impressions” as well (Ahmed 2007: 31). Having a female body provides the person with a certain meaning, value and role that has to do with ‘being a woman’ or having a ‘woman identity’. This concept of identity will be further discussed in the concluding chapter of this dissertation; for the time being I just want to make a point on how our embodied experiences are intertwined with the roles we perform and how the latter are value charged. It should therefore not come as a surprise to see the topics of family and gender brought together in this chapter. Family, as an institution, is very highly valued in Bolivian society; the women involved in this research unanimously acknowledge this and indeed their actions, including Internet access and use, reflect this in all spheres of their life.

In chapter six it is demonstrated how context and especially the women’s type of job (such as teaching or business) also influence their relationship with the Internet. However, this finding does not apply only to the Bolivian women. Chesley during her research on households in New York, discovered that “people use computing and communications technologies because they need to for work reasons or because they think these new devices will help with family needs, subject, of course, to resource constraints” (2006: 592), moreover, “different work and family characteristics matter in shaping the technology use of men and women” (2006: 605). Chesley gives the examples of education, income and gender as principal ‘correlates’ in technology use and which may actually indicate features of work or family environment. Interestingly, these are the aspects I decided to analyse myself after interpreting and prioritizing the topics discussed by the women in the interviews. These aspects then, at least at this point, are the big ‘frames’ (Entman 1993) of my analysis. However, the women, being historical beings, shape and are shaped by their ‘circumstances’, and this also plays a role in their emotional subjectivity.

Cerulo affirmed already in 1997 that the new technologies “locate the self in new hybrid arenas of actions; they mesh public and private...” (1997: 397); and, as in any other lived experience, they also mesh reason and passion, mind and body, all of which constitute the self, a self that is never fixed but, through its expressions and practices, is in a permanent state of becoming.

CHAPTER EIGHT

EMOTIONS AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY

8.1 PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter examines the emotions that are generated through the use of the Internet. Stratton (2010) affirms that although there have been studies conducted of people's behaviour in relation to the new technologies using a variety of methods and theories, we still know "very little about how users' emotions help define their Internet behaviour" (2010: 393). My interest in analysing and presenting the more recurrent expressions of emotional involvement within the women's interviews was not born of a desire to fill the scientific knowledge gap mentioned by Stratton, but simply to reach an understanding after reading, analyzing and interpreting them. There was no prior intention of an in-depth exploration of emotions and feelings⁵⁵ but I was invited to do so by the women's accounts themselves. However, the task was challenging for emotions are not always expressed in obvious ways and usually do not have clear borders. Usually our feelings, our 'felt experience', do not correspond to a single reaction but to a "complex, multifaceted nature of emotional ambivalence" (Stratton 2010: 393). Sometimes there is a simultaneity of emotions which can even be regarded as contradictory.

Stratton (2010) says that words are verbal, subjective expressions of the informants' emotions, however even if we all sense their meaning, we all live them differently. Interpreting a text for emotions goes beyond locating certain

⁵⁵ *Emotions* involve feelings: *bodily feelings and feelings towards*. *Bodily feelings* are sensations from the inside of the condition of one's body. *Feeling towards* is when an emotion is directed towards its object (person, state of affairs, action, or event), *feeling towards* is intentional and phenomenological, it is a way of thinking. Both feelings can be experienced as a unity. And an emotion is a *substantial event* with thoughts, feelings, bodily changes and expressions as its features. Goldie, P. (2002). "Emotions, feelings and intentionality." Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences 1(3): 235-254.

words and phrases; interpretation is also related to the ways they are expressed⁵⁶ and to the context to which they refer. Apart from that, feelings and emotions are not just a consequence of an activity but the result of intersubjective mechanisms (the inherently relational human understanding) which play a role in the women's appraisal of any given situation. Individuals can sometimes go through a lot of mixed and contradictory emotions while using the Internet as in any other human activity where different spheres, such as work, leisure, study or social communication overlap. The complexity of our emotional experience depends on how we make meaning of our world, an understanding which is mediated by our social interaction.

Here the phenomenological concept of *intersubjectivity* is key to understanding the ways in which people create meaning in context through their social participation. Smith, Flowers et al. refer to intersubjectivity as “the shared, overlapping and relational nature of our engagement with the world” (2009: 17). It is a concept that accounts for our communication skills and ability to make sense of one another. This concept can be related to the internalization process from the social constructivist perspective that says that we learn to grasp the manifestation of the subjective processes of others in a way that they become subjectively meaningful to us. However, that may not mean that our interpretation reflects the actual intended meaning of others (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 149). Therefore, the analysis presented here is an interpretation of the women's interpretation; and my wish is that the reader manages to share my interpretation through the arguments I present.

The main intention in this chapter is to show how our environment, at all levels, dialogues intersubjectively providing the elements for us to build a conscious understanding, and how less obvious rational aspects such as feelings and emotions also play their part. Helm (2009) affirms that emotions are intentional, passive, have an affective tone and can motivate to action. They are intentional

⁵⁶ For the analysis of this topic the reading of the interview transcriptions was complemented by listening to the interviews; in this way the ‘emotional’ sense of the words and ways of expressing (silences, stresses, tone) could be inferred from the voices.

because they are directed to an object; passive because they are responses that we mostly cannot control; affective because they are charged with positive and negative sensations and prompt us to action in several ways (2009: 249). In short, emotions are “essentially affective modes of response to the ways our circumstances come to matter to us” (Helm 2009: 254). If we can feel one emotion, then it is possible to feel the whole range of emotions. The capacity to feel happiness, for example, is directly related to our capacity to feel sadness; to feel satisfaction we need to experience the feeling of frustration. Mostly when people give accounts of their emotions, which involve feelings, they evaluate an object, a phenomenon. In a very general way, it can be said that emotions can be either positive or negative and either future-oriented or past-oriented. Helm identifies the following positive emotions: hope and excitement (future-oriented) and satisfaction and joy (past-oriented), and these negative ones: fear and worry (future-oriented); sadness and disappointment (past-oriented), and to the last two, guilt could also be added. This time-related understanding of the emotions is very useful when associated to a person’s level of agency and how much his/her actions are influenced by his/her emotions, and vice versa.

In the pages that follow I will deal with four differing emotions: fear, guilt, satisfaction and hope; all of these are related to the women’s specific experience when using the Internet. In line with the above emotional classification, fear and guilt are negative feelings; but fear is mainly future-oriented while guilt is past-oriented. Satisfaction and hope are positive feelings; satisfaction is past-oriented and hope is predominantly future-oriented. For the purpose of understanding them better, the analysis of these emotions is done in a sort of a ‘pure’ state; in isolation and taking one independently of all others. However, a lived experience, apart from being personal and unique, is full of complexities and with multi-layered emotional adherences.

8.2 FEAR: THE CITY METAPHOR

A conceptual metaphor is when “one domain of experience is used to understand another domain of experience” (Kövecses 2003: 14); I subscribe to this definition when I present my arguments to elaborate on the emotion of fear (implying also mistrust, anxiety and other related feelings) which underlies and frames several of the women’s activities and decisions taken on the Internet. Fear is a powerful emotion and a force that has permeated all layers of modern society in Bolivia; it is an emotion reproduced and nurtured in all aspects of daily life. Fear is what helps to write the imaginary survival guide to the urban context, and it seems to do the same for the cosmopolitan online one.

Let us now put these arguments into context: In Latin American society, violence and crime are complex phenomena. The region has seen an appalling increase in delinquency in the last few decades. Even though the experience and the response to fear may be different for each individual, people do feel fear and it is their society as a whole that generates, in one way or another, standardized notions of fear, violence, threat, danger and risk (Howard, Hume et al. 2007). As Rotker and Goldman (2002) point out in their book *Citizens of fear* Latin American social scientists developed the concept of a culture of fear to describe the daily experience of human rights violations in South and Central America. Fear is even reinforced by the lack of trust in the rule of law and has become widespread in the urban population (2002: 6). Violence, mistrust and fear are seen as factors that really hamper development in the region. As stated in 2009 by José Miguel Insulza⁵⁷, the head of the Organization of American States, violent crime “is an epidemic, a plague on our continent that kills more people than Aids or any other known epidemic. It destroys more homes than any economic crisis.”

⁵⁷ Declaration made at the OAS meeting in Mexico City, 2009. Carroll, R. (2008). Rampant violence is Latin America's 'worst epidemic'. [The Guardian](#).

But, the perception of violence and fear present in the social and individual imaginary⁵⁸ has trespassed from the offline world into the online; there is a perceived danger in the often melted, merged and mirrored offline-online relation, and to which the corresponding individual responses may vary. Cindy is a good example: the concept of fear nourished by the context is illustrated by the concern she feels, not for herself, but for her child. Here, the role of the caring mother is the top priority.

“My kid knows very well what to do on the Internet, she is a researcher by nature, I wouldn’t like to restrict her access to the Internet. However, I have to think about doing something, there is a lot of violence online, have you seen how the situation in Bolivia is nowadays? Laws are not strict, social networks are being used by criminal organizations. We have to find a way to take care of our children in a lawless country, right?” (Cindy).

This statement clearly shows how the discourse flows from the offline to the online world; Cindy refers to one to claim something about the other; she ties online violence to the offline Bolivian context and then goes back to the former when she mentions social networks and crime, which in one way or another, are related to the lack of governmental rules and laws. Her thoughts are a good example of how fear is reinforced by the absence of law, as Rotker and Goldman (2002) postulate, and how the online and the offline are not seen as being separate and distinct but one and the same.

Fear can be expressed in many ways and be the result of different situations. Here, fear is not a finite, precise concept, but rather an emotion with several connotations; these connotations sometimes overlap with other emotions and feelings which lead to a negative evaluation of an experience. The following quotations are examples of how the notions of fear and danger were implicitly mentioned at one point or another during the interviews by not only one but several of the women interviewed.

⁵⁸ Individual imaginary is conceptualized here in the way Barbero (2003) understands ‘imaginary’: as a mix of images and representations of our present life and dreams, and our right to hope and wish.

When online:

“I always take care not to invite or accept people that I don’t know to my online groups” (Nora).

“On the Internet you can do many things, get information, interact... but dealing with money? I don’t feel secure, I prefer interpersonal contact for that” (Rosa).

“A bad experience? Yes, I have been menaced, it happened when I tried to chat with people I didn’t know. Of course, I immediately closed the account” (Ana).

“I don’t know much about security, I know I can block people and there are security measures, but I also know that there are people who can gain access to your files. Maybe nobody is interested in me, but I am conscious that security is everything when online” (Cindy).

Nora refers to the danger of being contacted by strangers; Rosa fears the bad outcome of a financial transaction; Ana had actually been menaced and Cindy acknowledges the importance of online security. Maybe statements like theirs could have been made by either women or men of any age anywhere around the world, but they acquire special relevance when related to their own specific context, Bolivia. As mentioned in chapter two, 2.2.1, the development of Bolivian cities has been marked by a complex blend of inequalities and socio-cultural and historical tensions which has provoked an ever-increasing feeling of insecurity in the modern urban environment.

This increased feeling of insecurity has been nurtured by decades of authoritarian rule under the military regimes in the sixties and seventies. The later transition to democracy in the eighties was painful; this shift implied an expensive restructuring process of the state and one which had to be borne financially by the poor and working class, and more recently by the middle classes (Goldstein, Mignolo et al. 2004: 22). Even if the Bolivian state has adopted a formally

democratic stance, its historical weakness makes it impossible to implement significant democratic reforms. “In this context, the state’s inability (or unwillingness) to provide security to its citizens is one of the strongest sources of the delegitimation of the state in Andean nations today” (2004: 23). It is not surprising then, that residents of many Bolivian cities like Cochabamba are increasingly adopting extra measures to confront the crime to which they are exposed. Middle-class residents have fortified their homes against intruders and many neighbourhoods have joined together to hire private security firms to police their streets. Lacking the resources to hire others to do the job, residents of poorer communities, especially in Cochabamba’s peripheral southern zone, are taking matters into their own hands; they enact what they call “justice” through arbitrary beatings of those accused of crimes in their neighbourhood. Such actions compensate for the absence of official security providers (Goldstein, Mignolo et al. 2004: 24).

A quick review of local and national newspaper headlines reveals an increasing rate of violence in mainly rural and urban areas. “Civil insecurity”⁵⁹ has become one of the most-used journalistic terms and has also entered into common parlance. An increase in delinquency and an overall institutional discontent has led to a general feeling of insecurity and a permanent state of fear, and one which in turn is fed by the media. As Barbero (2003) says the media lives on fear and fear produces a loss of ontological security, a vulnerable sense of self. Urban spaces evolved from being protective for the individual to being what they are now, hostile and alien, and it seems very appropriate to try to gain an understanding of cyberspace with the same logic and critical eye of the urban space planner.

“I think we are very much influenced by the news, many people can get access to your data and use it in a negative way. Honestly I fear getting in touch with people unknown to me” (Lila).

⁵⁹ The exact term used in Spanish language is: “inseguridad ciudadana”.

“I know I have to be careful, there are dangerous sites, once I opened... I don’t remember what, and next day my computer was infected” (Olga).

Lila acknowledges that her fear is very much induced by the media, but there is more to it than that; bad things can happen while online. Online crime is not a myth; there is objective evidence, much as there is for offline crime. In the case of the women, Ana had been menaced, Inés harassed and Mili contacted by a scammer; and this is without mentioning the possibility of getting a computer virus, as Olga says, when visiting certain sites. So, fear refers not only to possibilities but also to their own experience or that of people they know. Let us not forget that “fear is always individually experienced, socially constructed, and culturally shared” (Reguillo 2002: 192); therefore fear, as any other emotion, is intersubjectively created.

People, now more than ever, fear the other, the unknown, the passersby; therefore they seek refuge in things and persons close to them. Inside the big and mostly-perceived-as-chaotic cities we find reassurance and security in small tribes, groups that result from our not-yet-destroyed social pulsation (Barbero 2003: 73). What people are looking for is “warmth” in cold, alien cities. Big spaces such as cities are abstract; we need to build small islands of warm relationships where we can share tastes, gestures and fears. Seemingly this is also the perception when online:

“I have always been careful in introducing new people to my online groups, if I don’t know them, I don’t accept them, but if they are people that I once worked with, or anyone from my family, it is ok. You know, there are so many people willing to be your friend, but if I don’t know them, I don’t accept them” (Ana).

“I think it is our idiosyncrasy; we fear the Internet because there are only bad things there, like if you are in Facebook you are going to be kidnapped, as we expect the worst, we don’t want to go there” (Tati).

Ana and Tati fear the unknown and fear to do certain things while online. But Tati, for instance, recognizes that there is a cultural-contextual factor that feeds into her fear. If her immediate offline environment was not safe, why should the Internet be different? Henson, Reyns et al. (2013) claim that studies on fear of online victimization are almost non-existent, even though there is much literature on cybercrime. “Researchers’ understanding of traditional fear of crime has gradually evolved, but whether these findings are applicable to fear of online crimes remains an open question” (2013: 476). Henson, Reyns et al. point out that our personal perceived risk of victimization is influenced by our own vulnerability and our immediate context. Here I stick to this thesis and I try to demonstrate how the perceived online risk the women have is influenced by their daily offline experience.

Ostria, Serrano et al. (2009) who provide a sound research of the current situation in the book *Vivir Divididos* (which can be translated as *Living Divided*)⁶⁰ affirm that Cochabamba is a fragmented city in relation to both physical and social spaces. This book puts special emphasis on fear as a concept and public space as praxis to show how architecture and socialization change in time, how citizens in Cochabamba and especially some social groups more than others are fear-invaded. Centuries ago men feared nature and created urbanized settlements to protect themselves, but the modern urban environment makes men fear other men. Cochabambinos are prisoners of their daily fear and their main response to fear is to retreat, to close themselves off in comfort zones; they prefer to renounce the city and abandon it instead of using it. “Young people invest their creativity in the construction of bubbles so they are able to deny others’ existence, the filthy, messy and dangerous otherness” (Ostria, Serrano et al. 2009: xii, my translation).

“I have seen boys and girls of a high-income class who seem not to belong to this world, they attend privileged places and they publish only photos of those places online, an expensive disco or things of that kind, and they

⁶⁰ “Vivir divididos” is the original title of the book, all quotations extracted from this book are translations made by myself.

delete anything that is not according to their lifestyle now, if they were poor, they delete the photos of their past” (Sara).

Sara shows how the ‘offline places’ that people make visible while online are part of one lived experience, creating symbolisms of where we stand in our social world. Generations are not compact structures but socialized agents within certain symbolic referents and historical coordinates. Most of my informants grew up in the seventies and early eighties and at that time Cochabamba lived and socialized in a different way and in different spaces. It was a “daylight” generation; occasionally they would go out at night under strict parental control. Public spaces such as squares, streets and street corners were “real socializing territories” and were used fearlessly. People of all social classes were buying at public markets, the only public university in town offered professional studies to young people coming from public and private schools. But this situation changed in the late eighties and nineties; in those years social actors migrated to different urban areas. The city fragmented, certain zones became autonomous with their own cultural features and with different urban services. The original centre of the city lost its gravitational attraction and stopped being a space for gatherings and physical encounters. And actually fear revealed itself as the main factor that influenced the new spatial appropriation; but fear is also the key factor not only in determining new ways of living but also of communicating (Barbero 2003). The contradiction here is that not only is it faster to work or socialize online, but also safer in relation to certain kinds of perceived risk. Online forms of interpersonal victimization inhabit a broad category (Henson, Reyns et al. 2013), so people discriminate instinctively what they should or should not do online. It is safe to say that the ‘bubbles’ people are creating to protect themselves are not only offline since the urban fear has invaded the online space.

“It’s worrisome when we don’t know who is behind a nickname, and obviously some insane people can be online anonymously, it can be an enormous danger for a woman... and also for a man. Nowadays, not only

women are in danger, we see many things, right? Kids are being kidnapped, organ trafficking, many things... people are more and more sick!" (Alex).

This reflection acquires a special relevance as it does not pertain to one of the women: it came from one of the men in the control group. Being one of the youngest participants he demonstrates that the perception of fear is possibly the same in both men and women, whether young or old. However, it is impossible not to consider the particularly vulnerable position of women in Latin American society in general, and especially in Bolivia. Just to give an example, in Bolivia one woman is murdered every three days⁶¹ and 'feminicide' has become just one more face of a domestic violence that has one of the highest rates in the region according to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights.⁶² Even though my interviewees belong to a rather high social level of educated families, and most of them demonstrated the confidence and freedom that only a safe familiar and professional environment can nurture, Inés said the following:

"Being a woman is difficult, I was harassed once online and I had to change everything, my phone, my mail, I remember at that time I cursed the computer and the Internet...worst of all, it was a person I knew and he was close to my family... but now it is over" (Inés).

Inés was lucky because she went through that experience when she was living with her husband and still at the parental home and that provided her with a lot of emotional support. The studies undertaken by Henson, Reyns et al. (2013) show that women are more afraid of abuse and that the kind of offence to which they are more generally susceptible is a sexual one, and up to and including assault. That is why Lyn's remark below says that she should not forget she is a woman.

⁶¹ Oblitas Zamora, M. (2013). Mary Marca: "El feminicidio visibiliza el asesinato con rostro de mujer". OH - Los Tiempos. Cochabamba, Editorial Canelas.

⁶² Seven out of ten women are victims of violence both in the home and in other spheres of society. Although Bolivia has adopted a series of legislative and political initiatives to reduce violence against women, in particular violence in the family and sexual violence, the problem remains as widespread as ever. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights OEA (2009). Follow-up report - Access to justice and social inclusion: The road towards strengthening democracy in Bolivia, Organization of American States. **OEA/Ser/L/V/II.135**.

“I don’t think being a man or woman makes a difference online. We have to take care no matter the gender, right? Mmm... But, obviously I’m a woman, I’m more cautious than them, men. I don’t accept people in Skype or Facebook... why should I get into problems?” (Lyn).

Lyn’s statement could be extrapolated to the city metaphor and say ‘a woman has to be cautious, she should not be talking to strangers in the street’. However, danger online could be avoided if the privilege of anonymity is used, as Lila points out.

“I think some women feel more courageous, more free when chatting, as nobody can see them. They have the freedom to express things that they wouldn’t in person, especially if they’re women, because women lack self-confidence” (Lila).

Barbero (2003) referring to a feminist analysis made in his country Colombia, finds that women have lost the city as the city excludes them. Irrational urbanization is being compensated by the efficacy and efficiency of the new communication networks, ICTs are a new mechanism to counteract loneliness and ostracism allowing new cultural links in a fragmented society. For the women in my research, the Internet world is a vast and broad one, there are areas that are more familiar to them than others; sites they know, sites they do not even know exist, places they know are safe, others that are risky. They know of people with whom they can talk and of people they should avoid. These women, like many of us, tend to create their own ‘online neighbourhoods’ where they stay and from which they do not dare wander. It is true to say “fear is not only a way of talking about the world, it is also a way of acting” (Reguillo 2002: 205). However fear sometimes being more evident in the women’s accounts, is not a prerogative of their gender as it was already demonstrated.

8.3 GUILT: TIME USE, WORK ETHICS AND SOCIAL ROLES

“In the Book of Genesis the work of creation takes six days and the Creator rests on the seventh day. Later in Genesis, when Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden, in addition to acquiring the knowledge of good and evil, Adam is condemned to *work*” (Veal 2004: 16).

I start this section with the above quotation as I will be reflecting on the notion of guilt related to the Internet use of the women. I connect this subjective emotion to reasons that, even if they seemingly correspond to individual circumstances, are anchored in more complex cultural and historical aspects such as religion, ethics and social values. According to Dattilo and Howard (1994), feeling a sense of guilt in relation to time use is closely related to the modern work ethic, and which nowadays applies to women and men in equal measure.

‘Guilt’ is one of the explicit emotions expressed by the women during the interviews. Unlike the previous case of ‘fear’, ‘guilt’ was purposely mentioned at some point in the interview questions. Since I could see that the women spent much of their day in front of the computer and using the Internet, I openly asked them if they had ever experienced a sense of guilt over spending too much time online to the detriment of offline activities; in most cases the answer was affirmative. However, and interestingly, some of the quotations from the women that assist me here in presenting the analysis do not come from their direct answers to the question about guilt, but were expressed at different times during the interviews and often in relation to other topics such as leisure, homework, family and social relations. I therefore interpret their answers in context as I did with ‘fear’, presenting the reasons for reading their words in relation to ‘guilt’. It is also worth mentioning here that some of the quotations were already cited when analyzing other personal and structural aspects of their experiences, which is proof of how the different topics tend to overlap even if they relate to various spheres of a person’s life.

As a general concept, ‘guilt’ can be understood as “an individual’s unpleasant emotional state associated with possible objections to his or her actions, inaction, circumstances or intentions” (Baumeister, Stillwell et al. 1994: 245); the latter is a psychological definition not linked to a specific situation, but that can be referred to the person’s subjective perception of being wrong or to others’ perception that this person may be wrong. In this research specifically, feeling guilty is an evaluative feeling⁶³ directly related to a particular situation; the use of the Internet. Many of the women interviewed acknowledged having felt guilty at some point while using the Internet. This sense of guilt was clearly associated to the idea of not doing something productive.

“Sometimes it happened to me that I feel guilty while online, because instead of studying or working I am looking for things that maybe are not so important” (Ana).

Ana’s sense of guilt is clearly associated to the idea of having priorities, a sense that certain things are more worthwhile than others. A good way to understand why we act, feel or behave in a certain way is to acknowledge past ideological legitimations (Williams 1983). In this regard, our modern ideas about paid work and leisure are very much influenced by the Judeo-Christian views of time, nature and the way technology is used and designed. From the early times of Judaism, even before Christ, labour was imposed on humankind to expiate the original sin. Later on and during the Renaissance the concepts of work and progress started to acquire a strong relation. Christianity, and especially ‘Protestantism’, viewed work as service to God and laid the moral foundations for capitalism; and industrialization established the discipline in a workforce dedicated to pursuing the ‘modern secular dream’ (Veal 2004). So, nowadays, at least in the Western world, work is of prime value; it is the motor for human progress and the means for achieving individual subsistence.

⁶³ For Helm, emotions are ‘evaluative feelings’, i.e. “intentional feelings of import: essentially affective modes of response to the ways our circumstances come to matter to us”. Helm, B. W. (2009). "Emotions as Evaluative Feelings." *Emotion Review* 1(3): 248-255.

As already demonstrated in chapter two, Bolivia has a syncretic culture, in which Hispanic and pre-Hispanic values have merged and in which the significance given to work has been very much influenced by the modernization process and the Christian religion which provided important normative aspects such as individual responsibility, equal rights and duties for all. Therefore, the current objective of shaping Bolivia to fit within the international parameters includes adopting the modern western work ethic (Mansilla 2003). So, feeling guilty for performing activities offline or online that interfere with work performance, or at least diminish it, is just an understandable expression of the individual's internalized work ethic.

"Sometimes I felt that guilt, for instance, I work till late, then I can't sleep and I turn on the PC to listen to music, or even worse, to watch a soap opera, and next day I woke up terrible, I only got a few hours of sleep. If it had not been for the Internet I could have been fresh and rested and fully able to work the next day..." (Fanny).

However, it must be acknowledged here that Fanny could very well anticipate the consequences of her actions but that did not prevent her from listening to music or watching soap operas, something she obviously regards as valueless when she says "even worse..." in the sense of "what a terrible thing to do". The fact that people consciously do 'unproductive' things online is what Stratton (2010) calls 'guilty pleasure' because they can produce simultaneous feelings of pleasure and guilt. Mili and Nora also recognize that they both do things online which they regret, but they use the present tense; not using a finite past tense for an activity leaves the possibility open of still doing it in the future, even if they felt a desire not to.

"Sometimes you overload yourself with Facebook or checking unnecessary things, I always tell myself 'this won't happen to me again'..." (Mili).

"Sometimes I regret being on Facebook all the time" (Nora).

Users engage in this kind of escapist behaviour, such as spending a lot of time on Facebook, as, even though they may appreciate adverse consequences, they perceive a short term benefit, a pleasurable feeling, which produces a perpetual conflict of emotional ambivalence (Stratton 2010: 397). This demonstrates that online behaviour and activities can be charged with emotional nuances making it impossible to associate them to single elements, either subjective or objective; each person evaluates situations and emotions in a different way and this influences their subsequent actions.

“I noticed that playing games online was far too time consuming and it started to turn into a vice, so I stopped playing two years ago... and, I prefer not to play anymore” (Sara).

Playing games was giving Sara more of an uneasy feeling than satisfaction; therefore she decided to cut deep and eliminate the activity once and for all. In experiencing guilt, the primary concern is with a particular behavior; it involves a “sense of tension, remorse, and regret over the bad thing done” (Tangney 1995, 1135). In Sara’s case playing games online made her feel that what she was doing was not right and, after a rational evaluation of the quality of time consumption, she gave up the habit of playing games altogether. ‘Time’ here is a very important concept for it is the canvas upon which we depict our everyday lives; activities ranging from the basic functional ones such as eating and sleeping, to others such as work and leisure. Thus, our understanding of time is related to our understanding of work and leisure and, within those spheres, to our understanding of guilt and pleasure. And as stated earlier, these emotions are not neat concepts; they overlap and can produce internal conflicts which are basically culture informed.

Therefore, our modern understanding of time, a product of our history, involves our sense of our work and leisure practices, which in turn are constitutive elements of the person’s well-being (Veal 2004). However, this sense of well-

being corresponds to a delicate balance of activities which are mediated by our environment, needs, motivations and even moral principles and beliefs.

Clocks brought a generalized time consciousness. Before the advent of clocks people's sense of time was more task-oriented; with clocks time became first a measurable good and ultimately a very precious currency that could be spent, used, exchanged and even wasted. Of course, nobody wants to waste money, in other words, time.

“There was a period when I was jobless and didn't know what to do at home, I used to waste time on the Internet, I spent my hours watching others' lives, that was a real waste of time...” (Inés).

“While on Facebook...I was just neglecting my work, what a waste of time!” (Mili).

Although with different lifestyles and daily responsibilities, Mili and Inés both feel the same stress related to ‘wasting time’; not even the fact that Inés was jobless could spare her from that feeling. ‘Time’ is not perceived nor does it become an issue when we are being productive; our consciousness of time changes, however, when we do not work, when we are not using it, but wasting it. The sense of time pressure is not necessarily related to an actual lack of free time, it is more a psychological response to the load of paid or unpaid work (Zuzanek 2004: 126). Besides this, the experience of time fragmentation is a characteristic of modern society; people do not only have the opportunity to change activities constantly, but many feel the need for constant change and this produces an emotional stress associated to what Zuzanek (2004) calls ‘time crunch’. Procrastination, in fact can be understood as a fragmentation of time in order to delay working; this means that the decision to work is not withdrawn, just postponed.

The Internet provides an ideal environment for the irrational fragmentation of time into short intervals. Individuals justify engaging in “some minor pleasure

instead of committing to the intended task” (Lavoie and Pychyl 2001: 432) because they rationalize the amount of work and the amount of time required for a more pleasurable activity. Here, procrastination on the Internet is “particularly alluring” due to the myriad of activities that are “quick and immediately rewarding and can be discontinued at will” (ibid.). The fact that a simple click of a mouse can take people to all kinds of distracting places leads them to think that reassuming the pending task is not so difficult either. So, procrastinating at the computer desk is creating a new group of “mouse potatoes” (ibid.: 433). Without doubt, procrastination in the Internet is one of the main behaviours that makes people feel guilty when not working or doing productive things; and it is very much related to our inherent work ethic.

“Well, information and leisure are easily combined on the Internet; there is always a diversion when one is looking for information because in the process one can so easily end playing a game or on Facebook” (Fanny).

Actually Fanny’s remark makes this “deviation” sound like something almost natural and unavoidable. Indeed, these intervals to delay work are triggered by the fact that distractions and task resuming is as easy as a click of a mouse button. Besides, people tend to remain convinced that they are still accomplishing the task because they never left the desk to procrastinate. Online distraction can work as a temporal stress relief, but it usually produces a more general feeling of “cyberguilt” (Lavoie and Pychyl 2001).

“... sometimes it happens even during the course. We should be listening to a lecture and all of a sudden we are doing other things, and we are people who know what we are doing and what we should be doing” (Isa).

Yet, in the case of the women interviewed, there is another important factor that contributes to the evaluation of their Internet time use and that is directly related to potential feelings of guilt, or at least of dissatisfaction or anxiety. This element is rooted in the culture and has to do with the expected social roles and moral values about priorities.

“No, I don’t consider being online is a waste of time, you always learn something, but the negative side about it is that you sacrifice time from your offline world. I feel bad when I neglect family or friends ...” (Clara).

“Sometimes I feel guilty doing things on the Internet and not doing what my mum has asked me to do” (Brisa).

Clara and Brisa refer to their ‘offline duties’ as members of a community, more specifically their social roles as family members. For the women who were mothers it was out of the question that there was anything more important than their roles as mothers. It would not even cross their minds to neglect their family chores for the Internet, even if that included work or study online. Ana and Cindy are both mothers of a young child.

“If I’m not online at the university, if it’s at home, then I’m usually online only at night when I am free of the household chores and my child” (Ana).

“I don’t feel guilty because I’m not an obsessive person, therefore I only spend the time I need on the Internet. I must remember that I have a family and a little child and my course ...”(Cindy).

This is a clear overlap between two different moral value systems; that of the work-ethic and that of the role in the family. The first one is individualist, the second one is communitarian. In Bolivia, ‘work ethic’ has a ‘western’ and ‘modern’ connotation; however, social roles share strong ‘ancestral’ and ‘endogenous’ values. As Mansilla (2003) argues, Bolivian society and culture is a blend of the European catholic legacy and the indigenous cultural aspect. In certain spheres the principles of individual productivity are more praised; in others it is more the collective values and the immediate solidarity to the group of belonging. Thus, for instance, the importance given to the roles that a woman must fulfill within the family are paramount, and women know it: first mothers, wives, daughters; and then, only later workers or students. These are not concepts that the women can neither resist nor question, they are the facts.

“I get up at 4am so I can be online, work and study and I’m on the Internet until 7am usually. In this way I don’t steal time from my little daughter and I’m able to do other things during the day, my chores, my work, being with the family and going to lessons” (Taty).

“...if I am not online it’s because I don’t have time, I need time to devote to my home and family. I have to find a balance” (Cindy).

Taty and Cindy demonstrate once more how family is so important for them and that implies not only an emotional bond, but a sense of duty. Baumeister, Stillwell et al. (1994) propose that “guilt is something that happens between people rather than just inside them”. Following the idea of intersubjectivity, guilt is an “interpersonal phenomenon” because it is linked to relationships, social bonds and symbolic affirmation. The women know that doing other things on the Internet apart from work is not good, it is not productive, but still sometimes indulge in those with the risk of feeling guilty afterwards; however, what they cannot afford is to neglect their social roles and family chores, elements that constitute and form their female identity.

In short, how one deals with negative emotions such as guilt, anxiety and frustration while using the Internet is related to many factors. My concern here was to highlight the main ones and to show how they related to each other. The work ethic provides a frame to understand time use and consumption, which in turn is affected by the social roles and moral principles instilled by society. But emotional experiences differ from one person to another, we all have the potential to feel and perceive something in a similar way but we do not always do.

“I think I never feel guilty, because I usually feel I’m doing something productive and I like it. Being in the Internet is not my favourite activity, but when something is useful, it doesn’t bother you” (Beta).

Beta claims she never feels guilty simply because she takes responsibility of what she is doing, she has a pragmatic attitude. Moreover, even if the Internet is not her

“favourite activity”, she seems to like it and to get satisfaction from it; she sees its usefulness. And satisfaction is the next topic under analysis.

8.4 SATISFACTION: MOTIVATION AND FULFILLED NEEDS

“In short, you use something because you want to get something from it, if you get nothing, you don’t use it anymore. If we use the Internet it’s because we get something, it’s not something material, it’s satisfaction” (Cindy).

Satisfaction is a complex emotional state produced during a certain experience and especially perceived after such experience. Satisfaction is a general feeling of contentment because our needs have been fulfilled and/or our expectations have been attained, or even exceeded (Patwardhan 2004: 419). Satisfaction is an important concept in many disciplines such as psychology, marketing or mass communication, and it is usually related to a specific object: job satisfaction, product satisfaction, media satisfaction and others. Obviously, my interest here lies in satisfaction gained from the Internet, or the satisfaction obtained from online activities. This topic was occasionally purposely discussed in the group interviews and occasionally indirectly mentioned in the individual ones. Let us consider the following extract from a group interview:

Lila: “To get the information one needs is gratifying; also to get money for a job you did on the Internet is gratifying”.

Nora: “For me the satisfaction is emotional”.

Lila: “It is because you use it to be in touch with the family, it is personal, then it is emotional, right?”

As can be seen here, Lila and Nora make distinctions in the quality of satisfaction they experience when on the Internet. Lila refers to gratification obtained from accessing content from the media, while Nora refers to a social and communicative use. It is interesting to note that they themselves make a distinction between gratification and satisfaction. Lila relates gratification to an

instrumental outcome and Nora links satisfaction to an emotional state. However, some authors like Sangwan (2005) regard satisfaction and gratification as interchangeable synonyms. There is no intention here to debate these terms, just to point out that my position on the topic is the same one as Stafford, Stafford et al. (2004) who understand gratifications as one aspect of satisfaction.

When Lila and Nora mention the elements that make them feel good when on the Internet, they are implicitly referring to their own motivations for a specific use and the satisfaction they gain from it. This last statement is in short the proposal of the theory of Uses and Gratifications (Joinson 2008). This theory, conceived within mass communication studies back in the forties and fifties, was formulated to understand how mass media audiences were able to satisfy their needs through active participation. In other words, the idea is that “audience members are largely responsible for choosing media to meet their needs and they are assumed to have considerable agency: they know their needs and how to gratify those needs” (Littlejohn and Foss 2008: 301). Lyn summarizes this last idea in the following statement:

“If you didn’t get satisfaction from what you do on the Internet, you wouldn’t be there, right?” (Lyn).

This theory lost relevance over the years as it was criticized for only taking into account the individual psychological gratifications derived from individual media use while tending to ignore the social context, but it came to prominence once again with the popularization of the Internet. The Internet offered more than what any other media had been able to previously, and now it was possible to speak about the individual and the social merging in the actions and interactions of the end user. The Internet slowly evolved from being simply a medium into a platform where content is created, shared, remixed and re-purposed, and where

the old media audience has evolved into an active user, producer, consumer or even a ‘produser’.⁶⁴

“I like to upload my things, I like to write articles, and thanks to the Internet my reach is massive, right? And that is power, I love to get feedback on the things I write and do, before I was only writing for the newspaper” (Olga).

Even if Olga acknowledges that previously she was writing for a newspaper (a mass medium by definition) for some reason she did not feel it “massive”; but it seems she has that feeling with the Internet since she gets direct feedback, she actually knows she is being read and she can interact with her readers.

Although Larose, Mastro et al. (2001) affirm that ‘uses and gratifications’ were regarded as a natural paradigm to understand the Internet because of its “emphasis on active media use and its ability to span both mass and interpersonal communication”, they argue that it has a limited reach if gratifications are only thought as gratifications sought and obtained and not as outcome expectations. With this idea in mind they propose the incorporation of socio-cognitive constructs such as incentive categories which include social, status, sensory, monetary and self-regulatory mechanisms (2001: 408). They base their proposal on the Social Cognitive Theory principles and they argue that Expected Outcomes as a concept improves upon the explanatory power of gratification. For example, “learning” and “socialization” are suggested as important motivations for Internet use, thus the potential for personal control and power is also embedded in Internet use.

“For me the Internet means possibilities, a world to know, to search for something, to experiment, to learn” (Rosa).

⁶⁴ ‘Produser’ is a term derived from the concept of *produsage* coined by Bruns, A. who defines it as a “as a model of describing today’s emerging user-led content creation environments where collaborative work is fundamental”. More on this can be found at Bruns, A. (2007). Produsage. Proceedings of the 6th ACM SIGCHI conference on Creativity & cognition, ACM.

“The Internet is like a train, it takes you everywhere and fast, you interact with people, you learn and you communicate; you can even feel what others are thinking, it shortens distances and time” (Tati).

“When people say “I am going to the Internet café” is like saying, I am going to my life online and that gives you a kind of special status, it allows you to be ‘more’, it separates you from your reality and own culture” (Ruby).

The last three examples clearly relate to outcome expectations and refer to different aspects or socio-cognitive constructs that prompt Internet use. For Rosa, it is about learning, for Tati about communicating and for Ruby a sort of ‘quality of being’. Thus, ‘uses and gratifications’ not only benefited from the contributions of the social cognitive perspective, but also, and especially, from the spectrum of motivational theories such as diffusion theory, self-efficacy and the intrinsic/extrinsic motivational model. For this reason, according to Stafford, Stafford et al. (2004) ‘uses and gratifications’ is not a theory but a motivational perspective identified in the unified model of technology use. The uses and gratifications theory implies the adoption of an innovation and “it is considered a ‘how and why’ approach to understanding media use motivations” (Stafford, Stafford et al. 2004: 266). Within the sequential evolution of this “how and why” media use there is a theory of self-determination which explains human motivation or the reasons why we feel moved to do something. “Motivation concerns energy, direction, persistence and equifinality... people can be motivated because they value an activity or because there is a strong external coercion” (Ryan and Deci 2000: 69). In other words, motivations can be triggered either in an intrinsic or extrinsic form; this shows that they not only vary in amount, but also in orientation. Basically, intrinsic motivation “refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable... Although, in one sense, intrinsic motivation exists within individuals, in another sense, it exists in the relation between individuals and activities” (Ryan and Deci 2000: 55-56). Let us see some examples:

“Well, I don’t know if anyone will read what I write if I upload it, but of course there is a great personal satisfaction in doing it” (Ruby).

“The Internet makes me feel really ‘connected’ to the world, I don’t feel physical distance among humans anymore” (Vivi).

“I love to work as a volunteer in social things, I’m a member of “Conscious Planet” so all my pages and groups online are related to these topics” (Sara).

For Ryan and Deci (2000), intrinsic motivation is better understood if associated to psychological needs of competence, autonomy and ‘relatedness’ which respond to the need for satisfaction in itself. When Ruby, Vivi and Sara acknowledge their feelings and the satisfaction they get from the Internet they are also showing a great sense of autonomy; while the feeling of competence is more evident in the statements from Emma and Isa:

“There have been a lot of changes since I started this course, the things I am asked to do require me to spend more time on the Internet, and more than I used to, and now I see more things than what I used to see before. I learn about new topics, it is really nice, enriching, I love it!” (Emma)

“I’m on the Internet because I like it, I want to be connected. I heard about Facebook, then I created an account, then I wanted to have Twitter, Second Life, whatever is new I want to experiment, Latinchat... I am very curious” (Isa)

Undoubtedly Emma and Isa are really enthusiastic about the possibilities on the Internet, and let us remember here that Emma is the one who feared computers and Isa is one of the oldest in the group and yet acknowledges that people from her generation are not so keen on computers. This demonstrates that individual interests and tastes are motivational factors which play an important role in digital inclusion (Sørensen, Faulkner et al. 2011).

Another way to feel motivated and gratified through Internet use is the facility of disclosing ourselves and establishing contact with others. So, relatedness is understood as a sense of belongingness and connectedness to persons, groups or culture (Ryan and Deci 2000: 64), which Nora definitely acknowledges in her Facebook use:

“Sometimes it crosses my mind that I have to publish something on Facebook, I want to say what I’m thinking, happiness, sadness or something... and then I get answers from my friends. I like that since most of my friends are from a different city, so I’m happy when I get replies”” (Nora).

Self-determined behaviour is not always intrinsically motivated, in other words regulated from the inside; it can also be extrinsically motivated. In this sense the “activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome” (Ryan and Deci 2000: 60). The degree of autonomy may vary from complete unwillingness to active commitment; from an external contingent reward to a more integrated regulation. However, there is a strong preponderance of the instrumental value of the activity, as seen in the following examples:

“The Internet makes your life easier, you don’t need to go out anymore, you can do many more things just at home” (Lila).

“I got the opportunity to take this course via mail, that day I told myself: ‘how fortunate I am to have the Internet’” (Ruby).

“For me the Internet makes my work easier, and provides me with more time, of course, one has to learn how to use it, and at first it’s a challenge... We cannot live without the Internet, it’s part of our daily lives” (Tati).

“The Internet for me is a means to achieve my goals in a better way, a more efficient way... first of all, without it, I wouldn’t be doing this course, and second, our family business would have many problems” (Beta).

Lila, Ruby, Tati and Beta clearly show by their statements that they ‘gain’ something using the Internet and this something is objective, almost tangible. If they were not using the Internet obvious results and outcomes in terms of activities would not be possible. However, the lines in the appreciation between intrinsic and instrumental value are not always neat and definite.

“It has to do with how useful things are, I was never a fan of Facebook, I went there first out of curiosity, then I started to find new people, get in touch with all friends, so I realized it’s useful, and currently we have given to it an educational significance; we exchange useful information for the course, so it’s a need” (Ana).

“...I think there are times when you start changing habits because you start to get satisfaction from new sources. There were times when I was interested in MSN because it gave me social satisfaction, and then I got interested in Skype. Right now, I don’t care about either of the two. I only care about the master course, or maybe it’s because I don’t have time” (Isa).

Ana and Isa also refer to Internet usefulness to accomplish tasks, but they add curiosity, interest and pleasure as other motivations for being online. So far it has been discussed how satisfaction acquires another flavour depending on the different types and levels of motivation, and that satisfaction is directly linked to the fulfillment of diverse needs and expectations. The more the Internet allows us to achieve these goals, the more time and use we will give to this medium. Social connection tends to increase the frequency of Internet use, while content gratifications increase time spent on a given site (Joinson 2008: 1035). Independent from the level of motivation is the fact that the Internet seems to be especially suited to satisfying needs of information, communication and entertainment. For instance Patwardhan (2004) related ‘online activity satisfaction’ to these three mentioned spheres but added one more: e-commerce, which in the case of the Bolivian does not apply since online economic

transactions are almost non-existent. However, Patwardhan's research (although conducted while social media was still incipient and not as popular as today) revealed that the activities of information search and communication were regarded as the most satisfying. This is also true in the women's case:

"The Internet makes my work a lot easier... whenever you need information or to communicate, you know there are people who are always there, it helps a lot" (Lila).

"Jokingly with my husband we say that the Internet is God, since all answers are there" (Lyn).

"Well, I do get entertained, I love to see about others' lives, famous people, just browsing..." (Ruby).

Lila openly refers to the provision of information and communication as the two main Internet functions that facilitate her work; moreover, both are linked when she associates the capacity to contact people with obtaining information. So, the information resource is not only the available online data, but also the millions of individuals who are online and who represent potential information capital. Lyn and her husband also perceive the Internet as an infinite source of information while Ruby, who had previously admitted that nowadays she does not have time for chatting or playing as before, acknowledges that Internet browsing is her best source of relaxation and entertainment.

Social networking sites are very popular in Bolivia and this proves the importance of Internet-based communication as a relational activity (Pornsakulvanich, Haridakis et al. 2008). "Social presence is a sense that others are psychologically present and that communication exchanges are warm, personal, sensitive, and active" (Papacharissi and Rubin 2000). Therefore, the satisfaction derives from social and psychological conditions. In this regard, Internet activities such as using the Internet for sociability, fun seeking and information seeking, were found to be positively related to various dimensions of social support (Leung and

Lee 2005: 174). And as mentioned at the beginning of this subheading, positive achievement emotions, such as joy and satisfaction occur when people sense accomplishment, comfort and fulfillment (Stratton 2010: 397), and such emotions, whether they are detached from the setting in which they are felt, Internet-based or not, contribute to general wellbeing.

“We, Bolivians, are ‘super facebookers’, good or bad internet users, we all have a Facebook account, we are very social...”(Beta).

Generally speaking, social interaction is a central component of leisure activities and the most positive experiences people report are usually those with friends (Leung and Lee 2005), and, moreover, in a context where friends and family are highly valued as key elements for societal happiness. The previous chapter looked at how understanding the role of family and friends is a key factor in understanding the women’s use of the Internet. It is important to bear in mind that “well-connected people, both online and offline, with strong socially supportive relationships would contribute greatly in both quality and quantity of life” (Leung and Lee 2005: 177); and for the women the analysis is quite clear: the emotions they experience send them signals on the meanings of their actions.

“You are not forced to be online, it’s not a duty, it is a pleasure, I feel well when I’m online” (Sara).

A study conducted by Graham and Lora (2010: 8) and aimed at assessing the quality of life in Latin America, including Bolivia, produced a list of the life domains that have an effect on satisfaction in general and therefore on people’s happiness; specifically, and in order of importance: economy, friends and family, work, health and housing. And these aspects can be linked to more abstract categories such as social support, leisure activities and standard of living that Leung and Lee (2005) claim contribute to people’s quality of life and that can be supported and maintained by the use of the Internet. In short, the idea is that if online activities have a positive impact on these life domains, then specific satisfaction derived from Internet use can contribute to a better

quality of life. And this is the experience of the women involved in this research.

8.5 HOPE: BEYOND GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS

Hope, like other emotional states, is hard to define as its multidimensionality is comprised of cognitive, affective, intentional, involuntary, individual and social aspects. Our emotions and feelings are created intersubjectively and have a universal human value; this is because they are culturally and historically shaped. Miceli and Castelfranchi (2010) introduce their study on ‘hope’ with a review of the different understandings of the ‘hope construct’ through history. They show how in ancient times, hope was associated with fate; while later theological hope rested “on God’s promise of a better future” (2010: 252). With the Enlightenment, science changes the face of hope with the rational promise of progress. Modern times present, in turn, a secularized notion of hope understood as a psychologically positive attitude, which needs to be researched and, if possible, empirically quantified.

Nowadays ‘hope’, as many other emotional dimensions of human life, still represents an area of great interest for many disciplines, there is still much to say and much to discover about this emotion (Edwards, Ong et al. 2007). I do not intend to open a debate on the topic, especially when “hope researchers don’t appear to have achieved consensus on the question ‘What is hope?’” (Miceli and Castelfranchi 2010: 254). My interest here is to present how hope is ‘talked about’ by the women in relation to the overall discourse on the Internet. First of all, let us remember what was mentioned at the beginning of the chapter relating to the time orientation of human emotions. Helm (2009) understands emotions from their intentionality. Therefore, hope, like fear, has a future projection; in other words, the object at which the intention of hope is aimed is future oriented. In my interviews the women were not directly confronted nor asked about hope; it was not a topic of discussion. However, my interpretation here demonstrates that hope, like other emotional states, is always present, even in discourses that apparently bear no relation to explicit emotions.

“In the future I’d like to give lessons through e-learning, at distance; that would be a way to be connected with other people and places...” (Brisa).

Brisa’s quote is an example of an “anticipatory representation” (Miceli and Castelfranchi 2010: 254) and hope is a complex phenomenon related to diverse anticipatory representation models and concepts such as optimism, agency, motivation, self-efficacy, self-esteem and expectation. For Snyder (2002), hope is a positive sense of agency and planning directed to achieve certain goals. As agency becomes a motivational force, the senses of self-confidence and of self-esteem are also involved. This author tends to attribute to the cognitive part an important role in hope, even more important than the feelings involved. This way of understanding hope has consistency with the phenomenological idea of ‘intentionality’ mentioned at beginning of this chapter; which presents emotions also as a way of thinking (Goldie 2002).

Goals are a relevant concept within hope; they provide the cognitive sense to it. Goals have a temporal frame which ranges from short term to long term intentionality. Snyder calls “pathways thinking” to our “journeying through” time, thinking how to get from one point to another; and he defines “agency thinking” or the motivational component as “the perceived capacity to use one’s pathways to reach desired goals” (Snyder 2002: 251). Sara’s and Beta’s statements present both concepts. They have future plans, and they are also developing strategies to bring them about.

“I’m thinking of working with e-commerce in the future. There are several ways to do that; you don’t really need to have a physical store, I’ll be the intermediary between suppliers and clients” (Sara).

“I took this Master course because my husband and I had already been thinking of creating an educative portal about health, nutrition and ecology, in other words, about social responsibility. We also think that social networks have a great potential for this, so we could actually have two ways to implement our ideas; a formal channel and an informal one...” (Beta).

People develop different levels of hope, although hope changes according to our circumstances; there are people who tend to be low-hope or high-hope endowed. For the former, the constraints are the elements of stress and apprehensiveness, while for the latter, limitations are perceived as challenges that must be optimistically faced. Snyder explains that the reason why there are people with different levels of hope is because hope is learned, “we learn hopeful, goal-directed thinking in the context of other people” (2002: 263).

“Mmm...in the beginning of this course I thought how good to teach the Lord’s word through this medium would be, that was my first intention and, as you know I am Christian...but now I don’t know, now I work in a university, I don’t think that the people I work with is going to like it...”
(Vivi).

Vivi’s statement shows how her future plans undergo changes according to her present circumstances and how these changes result in her being less motivated and with a low level of hope. Clara, on the other hand, is endowed with high hope and is always enthusiastic when facing a new challenge.

“For me the Internet is very important, motivating, I make sure that I have access all the time. I love to browse and search and I also look for possibilities.... I search for job opportunities or to create my own opportunities. And right now I’m researching business models, I like that type of thing” (Clara).

Clara is one of the women who most clearly showed optimism about the things she uses to do online, indeed she was always making her points in a very animated and vivid voice.

Along a different track Miceli and Castelfranchi propose that the core constitutive elements of this emotion, which already imply a sense of agency, are the “mere belief of possibility” of something and the “goal or wish” that this occurs. These two elements combined produce a great resistance to disappointment (2010: 255). These authors make a distinction between expectation and hope. For them

expectation is “an anticipated event that is both forecasted and desired”; although similar, hope implies no proper forecast, embracing instead “probable and improbable desires” (Miceli and Castelfranchi 2010: 257). And desire confronts people with their limited agency and with uncontrollable forces that always play a role in all kind of events. Hope is more than wishful thinking for it implies a belief in possibility and this makes it more difficult to be disappointed, this is in contrast to expectation which implies a sense of certainty (ibid.: 259). Here are some examples of this way of understanding hope, where only possibilities and wishes matter:

“I’d like to have my own website and help people to learn. I like to learn and share what I learn” (Brisa).

“E-learning, slowly, slowly will become part of our lives. I’d like to use online resources to teach my course at the university” (Emma).

A very interesting aspect of the Miceli and Castelfranchi (2010) analysis about hope is that it shows that fear and hope, being very different and opposite emotions, can in fact coexist. This mixed state is what they call anxiety, and fear and hope alternate in an anxious state. Hope is shaped and constrained by our abilities, the lack of agency, information and other factors. In optimistic persons, hope wins the battle against fear prompting a more positive expectation (2010: 265). Cindy is the woman who showed great apprehension towards the Internet and made strong statements about being careful while online due to the amount of violence nowadays (see my analysis on ‘fear’, p. 234); she is, however, the clearest example of how hope and fear coexist since she was also able to evaluate the positive side of being online:

“I started this course because I wanted to create new opportunities in my life...I know I could use the Internet for economic goals, but I’m not confident, so I do what I know... I’m on this course because I want to take advantage of the Internet. When we get better at something, then things get

better. I want to work with what I know, I want to create a platform to teach mathematics” (Cindy).

Hope, in a way, is the antidote to fear. “Desirability fuels optimistic predictions” (Massey, Simmons et al. 2011); in other words, positive outcomes are predicted because achieving the goals is considered very probable.

“The Internet allows you to see beyond, it gives you a broader vision. You can read several perspectives on a topic, then you have the power to decide and assume a position, and this helps women to be more secure in themselves” (Lila).

If one focuses all one’s energy on the future and motivates oneself to action, then there is an active hope. When one realizes that agency is impossible and one relies on the intervention of external forces, then the hope is passive according to Miceli and Castelfranchi (2010: 268).

“Telecommunication is a revolution, with only a “click” you can achieve many things, you always hear about new ways to make money online. I know it’s very difficult, but I’m still very interested in this possibility... I was thinking of implementing a client-to-client model, but I needed to invest in advertising. You need to create trust in people but that costs money... the Internet is an option to improve and increase opportunities, we only should worry when there are no options left” (Clara).

Clara clearly demonstrates an active hope and has the confidence that her ideas may work although she acknowledges the problems and difficulties. What makes her so confident, however, is that she feels she can act; she can intervene, think and choose from her possibilities.

“We need guarantees in order to buy online. You need to trust, and there is a lot of mistrust. We need proof, then we will risk, little by little...” (Lila).

Lila, on the other hand, experiences passive hope in relation to online shopping. In order for this activity to be a reality for her, she feels that certain things have to

be in place first, not least the offline conditions and the financial system; it does not depend exclusively on her own agency.

Hope represents the triumph of an optimistic attitude in the face of bad past experiences (Massey, Simmons et al. 2011). For Miceli and Castelfranchi “as long as there is hope, unfulfillment and actual frustration are relatively easy to endure...If there is no possible anticipation of a better future, there is no meaningful future, and little reason to live as well” (2010: 270). The group of women in this research demonstrates hope in a better future and their actions are oriented to that. Despite all the limitations that Internet technology may have in Bolivia, the women recognize that it will play an important role in their future; if this was not the case, there would be no reason to take the master course they are taking right now.

Understood existentially hope relates to the meaning and value in life; it is not only a process that involves thoughts, feelings and relations, it is also a spiritual need. But the way hope is experienced is greatly influenced by the “person’s outlook on life” (Benzein, Saveman et al. 2000: 304). Edwards, Ong et al. (2007), who studied the young Latino community in the United States, mention that persons who foster hope are persons who live in a positive affective environment; they experience life satisfaction, have support from family and friends, have good health in general and perform well in their daily activities. Undoubtedly there is a disposition towards hope when it is lived together with other positive psychological constructs. Meaningful relationships are a key component in the overall experience of hope. Although, Benzein, Saveman et al. (2000) perform a methodological and theoretical different study from Edwards, Ong et al. (2007), they also demonstrate that there are certain *sine-qua-non* elements in human beings such as health, family and social support that foster hope, and so intrapersonal, interpersonal and transcendental levels are merged in this emotional construct.

The phenomenological approach of Benzein, Saveman et al. (2000) to hope revealed an internal process related to the “person’s being” and an external one

related to the “person’s doing”. Undoubtedly these processes are related and cannot exist independent from each other. Hope related to being is necessary for survival. It is our enacted future being shaped in the present. It can be self-oriented or world-oriented. It deals with our possibilities in life and posits ourselves as part of a bigger project, as participants in the interminable march of human development.

“I started to use the Internet to acquire more knowledge, to learn, to improve my work, it was never about money...” (Inés).

“You can use the Internet to be creative. Our children will grow being creative, we had to learn how to use it, but they use it naturally” (Isa).

“I was always curious about technology, but at the same time I was very fond of humanities, so I didn’t know how to mix both till I decided on education. And, of course, your circumstances in life count. Life is a game, what you want, what you dream and what happens, all that together constitutes what you are, obviously thanks to God I have had favourable circumstances to make things happen. I think we are taking the right decisions” (Beta).

Inés, Isa and Beta, all three express that their hope is more related to their ‘being’ than to their ‘doing’. Inés cares about what she will know, Isa about what she will be and Beta about what she will be able to become. Hope related to being is a “precursor” to hope related to doing (Benzein, Saveman et al. 2000: 309). Hope related to doing is action oriented and includes goals and considered possibilities; it not only includes global hopes but also hopes regarding ourselves and our significant others. This kind of hope is “reconstructed through various stages of life” (ibid.: 308) since the meaning of hope changes throughout life. Here are some examples where hope related to doing is made more or less explicit:

“First of all we must know how to use technology, we have to learn. The Internet is a resource and we have to see what possibilities we can generate, and to generate new resources. We have a business, we sell organic

products and I started to work on solving technical problems for my company and that is the reason why I study this course...I will be using the Internet to monitor my business” (Beta).

Beta, who had previously mentioned her hope of being, now she relates the Internet to her hope of doing. In order to be or become, one needs to act, to do something and she has a specific strategy to accomplish her goals.

“You can have the opportunity to make money, to publicize yourself, to have your web page and to get work” (Mili).

“I would like that my students really learn to use the Internet as a tool to search for information and to generate knowledge. They are wasting it” (Olga).

Mili speaks about a personal hope of doing something for herself, for her aim of making more money, while Olga relates this kind of hope to her students. She hopes her students ‘do something’ useful with the Internet and that they can use it in different ways, which will then help them to be or become different, more knowledgeable.

The way we experience hope has to do with the way we experience meaning. “The will to live and to be part of life is released when meaning is experienced” (Benzein, Saveman et al. 2000: 314), and that is why hope changes throughout life since our possibilities and the meaning we confer to them also change. The quotes used here to deal with the topic of hope clearly reflect the interests, roles and life stages of the women. They speak about their work, their profession, their families; middle age women who care about future generations but also about their own future. Their remarks are an evaluation of their own possibilities, dreams and limitations. In their healthy midlife years hope for being is underlying and taken for granted and consequently hope for doing is more strongly felt and prioritized:

“I think we’ll be using the Internet for all kinds of work, the whole world is moving around the Internet, business, education... I would only stop doing what I’m doing for economic and family reasons” (Emma).

“I don’t see any activity that can be separated from technology, whatever I will do in the future will be related to the Internet...” (Lyn).

Future projections such as the ones described in the women’s accounts are a clear acknowledgement that hope is the motor of life and is part of our daily activity, the Internet included. Tomorrow can only be lived if we hope for it. Hope is within us throughout our life journey, and it is the last one to die. The Internet, for all it represents, is not simply another space in which humans can plant their seeds of hope, it can also be a tool, a means by which to try to make dreams come true.

8.6 WRAPPING UP ON EMOTIONS

As already stated, emotions are a complex, “substantial event” (Goldie 2002) that are not perceived, nor exist in a pure state. Emotions comprise feelings and cognition; they are charged with intentionality and are time-oriented. We live emotions in relation to the meanings we experience; there is reciprocity of reference to oneself and to the world conceived in respect to the environmental and cultural background. *“Feeling oneself and feeling towards are inextricably bound together”* (Stephan 2012: 158). In other words, emotions are individual, subjective, and intersubjectively created; they are in connection with other human beings and the whole world.

My analysis dealt with four specific emotions: fear, guilt, satisfaction and hope. These were the most relevant emotions that the women (not always purposely and explicitly) discussed at one point or another in relation to the Internet. This ‘emotional’ reading of the topic, although individually generated and specific to some cases, has a universal value for all our everyday activities which are permeated with emotions. However, the specificity of the present reading relates

to the particular elements that are most relevant to the four emotional experiences mentioned.

Fear was generated in most of the women in relation to the Internet. This was not from a perception of their own 'poor computer skills', as one could have thought, but from an evaluation of macro structural forces over which they had no control. This prevents the women from having a sometimes relaxed attitude towards Internet use and online content. Their perception of violence in their immediate offline environment, in their neighbourhood, city or country (resulting from a general socio-political and economic situation) is mirrored in their Internet imaginary, and makes them act accordingly.

The women's feelings of guilt while online can be related to a response to internalized values. These values are the result of historical and cultural processes within different spheres such as ethics, social relationships and responsibilities, economic system and even religion. Time use and performance expectations in relation to work and social roles are also in play within this emotion. Education and the family upbringing are of prime importance to the way the women have internalized these values.

The Internet provides satisfaction because it allows the women to fulfill needs and accomplish goals, and this is a great motivator for increased Internet use. Many of these needs and goals are created by society; they are not survival needs but ones mostly related to spiritual matters; to achieve an educational level, to foster social relationships through communication and family support, to gain status, to be entertained or even to experience sheer pleasure. In general, the women confer onto the Internet a strong instrumental value which allows them to generate the feelings of gratification and satisfaction.

Hope is our world of future possibilities, whether they are attainable or not. In the women's anticipatory representations in relation to the Internet there are two clear dimensions: economy and education. When hope is understood in the sense of pathways and agency, i.e. hope related to doing, they relate the use of the Internet

to the generation of money, a source of employment and getting other types of benefit. Nonetheless, when hope is lived in a more transcendental way, the women think of the Internet as a possible means of education, transformation and shaping future generations, i.e. the ‘hope of being’ as humans.

Fear, guilt, satisfaction and hope demonstrate that “we feel our concerns and evaluations towards dimensions that have particular significance for ourselves” (Stephan 2012: 158). As stated at the beginning of this chapter, emotions have no clear border and can be experienced contemporarily; therefore, we can simultaneously feel love and hate or like and dislike for something or someone, including ourselves. In the case of this research, the Internet makes the women ‘live’ different feelings and emotions; the ones discussed here are surely not the only ones, but they are among the most relevant. These emotions clearly ‘inter-operate’ inside the women’s subjectivity; satisfaction helps the women to overcome their fears, guilt can be assuaged, and hope will always be working in the background when they make choices, both conscious and unconscious, while online.

CHAPTER NINE

FINAL DISCUSSION

9.1 FROM NARRATIVES TO DISCOURSES

The time has come to evaluate and collate all the elements which have been collected throughout this research. The analytical journey has taken me down some paths I was able to foresee from the outset, but also along other ones which I did not expect to encounter. Along the way I had to decide where to stop, where to turn, what to select and what to disregard to be able to get to this provisional finishing line. It is necessary to look back and gain a perspective on the ground covered in order to perceive the progress made.

Firstly, my intention is to highlight some of the main methodological and theoretical elements I had packed in my luggage before starting out on this journey, a journey which was motivated by my mundane and personal curiosity about what women other than myself were doing on the Internet and how they were living the experience. Secondly, and most importantly, I place an emphasis on how to transcend individual experiential expressions. This is done in order to grasp the range of possible ways of experiencing the Internet, all of which are anchored in the specificities of the context. Finally, I concentrate on discussing some ideas, at a theoretical level, that I consider crucial to wrapping up the whole analytical effort. I am conscious that my reflections throughout this work have adopted a multidisciplinary perspective, and I hope they can contribute to the analysis of the notions of 'experience' and 'technology' in a general way within the field of digital culture, an interdisciplinary field by its very nature.

From the outset I stated that I would not be focusing on arriving at quantified, measurable generalizations and I opted for a qualitative study that would allow me to get to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. I learnt in my research process what O'Connor (2001) so brilliantly states: qualitative research is not a

unified vision in opposition to quantitative research, but rather a "developing, complex field fraught with contradictions, ambiguities and gaps" (2001: 139). O'Connor discusses the existence of three qualitative research perspectives; the 'interpretivist' or traditional, the critical and the poststructuralist. She also affirms that labelling them is complicated, especially when they have to be linked and framed within specific theories and methods such as grounded theory, phenomenology or discourse analysis as in the present research. O'Connor arrives at the identification of these qualitative research perspectives after analysing the "painstaking" process of her doctoral research. She was, like me, studying experience; she had started her 'journey' with a contextual categorization of topics from her in-depth interviews, but then realized that this was not really grasping the contradictions and complexities of the stories. She therefore turned to discourse and narrative analysis recognising that this analytical strategy also entails a variety of approaches since there is no single, precise understanding of both terms. In the end she understood that her work was not only about personal stories but that she had to transcend them to make sense of the meanings implied. In doing so, she had to acknowledge that there is no single way of understanding, and that highlighting some aspects implies hiding others; thus there is no way to write a complete inclusive theory (O'Connor 2001). My analysis has followed a similar path, mixing elements from all three perspectives. However, the sharing of her reflections here must not be understood as a way of justifying limitations, gaps or weaknesses in a research, on the contrary, they should be read with their genuine intention: to show that any research is a transitional process.

As understanding experience was my primary goal, I focused on phenomenology as my epistemological starting point since the main interest of phenomenology is to bring to the surface that which lies beneath the experiences of everyday life. To be able to accomplish such a thing, the researcher must establish a close relationship with the phenomenon and therefore he/she cannot adopt the so-called "scientific disinterestedness"; on the contrary, he/she has a strong interest due to a genuine and full involvement with the phenomenon (Van Manen 1990: 33). I

liked this idea very much since it is in harmony with the objectivity discussion within feminist studies, showing that phenomenology can be a very useful research tool for these studies. However, according to Cosgrove (2000: 256) phenomenology, with its strong descriptive component aimed at identifying the structures of an experience, can fail to situate those structures in a larger socio-political realm. Therefore, for Cosgrove discourse analysis enlarges the scope of phenomenological methodology. And, as already discussed in chapter four, from Alcoff Martin's point of view phenomenological descriptions and discourse analysis are not exclusive but complementary.

In chapter four it was explained that discourse is a "contested term and used in different senses". In a linguistic understanding it can be regarded as "language beyond the sentence", and sociologically speaking, or the way it is understood in this research, as forms of knowledge and practice (Litosseliti and Sunderland 2002: 9). Since a discourse is a way of seeing the world, it is more precise to talk about discourses in plural rather than in singular. Discourses entail a range of possible statements about a particular topic; in other words, and from a poststructuralist understanding, within discourse a "plurality of meanings is welcomed" (Gavey 1989: 462). Discourses are multiple, and they offer competing, potentially contradictory ways of giving meaning to the world (ibid.); this is so because poststructuralism "proposes a subject that is fragmentary, inconsistent, and contradictory" (Gavey 1989: 465).

As stated in the introduction of this dissertation, the main research question enquired about how my subjects of research, the Bolivian women selected, expressed narratively and discursively their experience with the Internet. Throughout the analysis of their accounts in relation to their Internet experience many topics were discussed which were analyzed in regard to the context and specific theories; however, so far I made no attempt to unify the various ideas under one inclusive frame regardless of the specificities of the individuals. I argue that such a task is possible if attention is given to the identification of the discourses underlying the single narratives. Since discourses are "a particular way

of representing the world" (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 143), I identified two major and contradictory discourses in relation to the Internet: one clearly shows all its virtues and benefits to its users, and the other speaks about its harms and negative side. In doing so, my analysis is transcending the range of personal accounts and shifting to discourses (O'Connor 2001). This process that "de-centers" the individual provides a "useful way of understanding contradictory messages and actions at the personal level" (O'Connor 2001: 151). According to Altheide and Schneider, the way we talk about things, the way we frame our experiences in discourses is "crucial for what we take for granted and what we assume to be true" (2012: 69); it also helps others to make our lives intelligible to them.

In the pages that follow I provide first a short summary of the main elements highlighted in the previous chapters with the aim of supporting the presentation of the two opposing discourses identified. But I also go further by analyzing the existence of discourses in between these two poles which reveals the range of possible ways in which the women relate to the Internet. This demonstrates that meanings are not fixed but combined; it is not one trying to deny the other, but an overlapping flux of reconciliation and paradox.

9.1.1 WATCH OUT! DANGER LURKS BEHIND THE SCREEN

The identification of the various discourses when studying a text is, according to Jørgensen and Phillips, a process of analytical construction done by the researcher to answer the research question (2002: 147). Discourses are lines of thought that are not explicitly stated as such, but that can be implied from the many recurrent utterances of the subjects. In this regard, and in many occasions at different points, the women in this research argued that being on the Internet may be and is a dangerous experience. Therefore, one of the recurrent discourses revolved around the 'negative aspects of the Internet'. Here, I present a summary as a reminder of some of the women's assertions. The emphasis is no longer on who

said what, but rather on what was said since all the women, with no exception, had provided a negative remark at some point or another.

“As the Internet is not for children, we have limited its access at home”

“Online nobody sees you; everyone can be anyone, it is dangerous”

“Men change, they can be more daring and aggressive online”

“I wouldn’t buy online because it means scams and crimes”

“Facebook? One has to be careful, you may be kidnapped”

“I don’t feel secure dealing with money while online”

“If you go to suspicious sites you get a virus”

“I am a woman I have to be more cautious”

“My students waste time on the Internet”

“I don’t like e-learning. It is impersonal”

“I had to close my account”

“I was harassed”

The way we refer to an object is also the way we experience it. In the field of discursive psychology the meaning we give to experiences is through the words we use; they do not merely describe the experience, in a way they actually re-create it. Thus, the way the women talk about the Internet reflects the way they live it.

A negative valuation of the Internet can be found in all the topics touched upon by the women. It could refer to a variety of issues; access, uses, activities and stirred feelings. This was also evident when talking about family, even though ‘family’ is the topic which had the most ‘positive’ discourses in relation to the Internet. In general the women are worried about their children and how they use the Internet. They are also worried about other family members, usually younger ones who are regarded as the generation most vulnerable to the danger that Internet use can represent. Some women also referred to the fact that the Internet “steals” time that they could be giving to family members, and it can be a hindrance to other offline relationships too.

Speaking about other negative aspects, the women relate that the Internet is not a safe environment for economic transactions; there are no guarantees and one can fall very easily into fraud and scams. Even online education is not free from the drawbacks of Internet use; it requires a lot of technical resources, it is 'impersonal', it does not allow adequate feedback, and is generally perceived as being far from perfect. Gender is also an issue; if you are a woman "you need to be more careful".

A general underlying feeling was that the Internet makes its users 'vulnerable'; you can lose something, whether it be your privacy, your time or your money. You can be verbally, morally or even physically attacked. Among the reasons given for the need to protect children and oneself is that the Internet fosters anonymity. However, anonymity is two-sided; it poses danger when 'the other' is anonymous not when the women use it to their advantage.

All in all, the negative aspects mentioned by the women referred to things they cannot do, they should not do, or they should be careful about, and all these provided negative feelings such as fear and guilt. The Internet, with all its entertainment potential, distracts the women from many of their duties. They "waste" their time since the Internet is a fertile field for 'deviant leisure' and this makes them feel guilty. But guilt was not the most worrisome emotion, for it is still within the means and will-power of the women to control the activities that produce this emotion. Fear, however, becomes a more worrisome feeling as it is future-oriented and represents the apprehensive anticipation of something bad.

In general, fear has its justification in the lack of security and protection that should be felt and established beforehand in the offline world. This is why the analogy used is the fear felt by an individual within an urban environment, the city, a modern settlement full of dangerous urban tribes. As in the city, on the Internet "there is a clear relationship between perceived risk of crime and fear of crime" (Henson, Reyns et al. 2013: 477). Clearly, the women's perceived risk affects negatively on their perception and behavior towards the Internet.

However, “an individual’s level of fear of crime is often influenced by his or her previous experience of crime” (Henson, Reyns et al. 2013: 479). In relation to this, although some of the women had had a bad experience on the Internet, many of them justify their current negative valuation by mentioning the broader ongoing public discourse about crime which is generated by the media and influenced by a general sense of insecurity. “The media highlights sensational, sometimes bizarre crimes which seem especially realizable through these media – *the Internet*-, most prominently sexual predators luring victims from their homes. Behind these more lurid examples lurk other significant crimes and misdemeanors: credit card theft, threats to privacy, copyright violation, problems of equity in distribution and access, harm caused by hacking, viruses, etc.” (Ess 2002: 11). It is interesting to notice, how these so called cyber-crimes of the Internet era, have been imported from the offline world, for they were always crime forms that endangered human existence.

So, the offline Bolivian context with its lack of laws, lack of civil safety and protection, generalized crime, plus specific ideas about crime related to the online environment - scams, harassment, addiction, bullying, anonymity and easy access to dangerous or immoral content - provides the women with an unavoidable overall sense that there is something really dangerous on the other side of their computer screen.

9.1.2 THE ‘WORLD WIDE WONDER’

When the women were evaluating the Internet positively, they expressed themselves much more enthusiastically than when they were discussing other topics related to this research. They recognized that the Internet very often provides them with good feelings. They feel satisfaction about the things they can accomplish using the Internet, either in the private sphere of interpersonal relations, or in a more public arena such as work and education. And they are not only satisfied with what they have already accomplished or only happy about what they are currently able to do; they are also excited about the many other

things they expect to do and accomplish in the future through the use of this technology. The following statements provide examples of their positive attitude towards the Internet:

“Keeping in contact with my family has been the best experience of my life”

“It helps women; it makes their chores easier, they can stay at home”

“People have better opportunities, they can improve their education”

“Men’s personalities change: they are more polite, respectful”

“On the Internet women are more free, offline I have limits”

“It helps me with my work and I find entertainment”

“The Internet represents new work opportunities”

“The Internet is an endless source of knowledge”

“It keeps the family and your friends together”

“I use it to volunteer and help others”

“You can know the world”

“It has all the answers”

What the women praised the most about the Internet was its utilitarian aspect as an excellent communication and information tool. The main idea was that it provides information, it helps in communication and strengthens social networks. The fact that the Internet reduces the tyranny of distance is just a ‘wonder’. The women foresaw the disappearance of physical borders and a future in which they are able to instantly communicate around the world at an affordable price, confirming that “the Internet is the most powerful technological development of the late twentieth century” (Johnson 2008: 72). It brings together individuals, institutions, industries, business and, it has a global “many-to-many communication” scope (ibid.). It is without doubt an outstanding technical achievement and is perhaps the most revolutionary communication and information technology ever developed. For Blank and Dutton (2011), the Internet is essentially a technology for communication and much of its attraction lies in the reduced costs of e-mail, video calling and the almost costless information search feature, all of which supports the women’s experience.

For these women, the Internet is very important in their family relationships; family in Bolivia is a highly respected cultural institution and the Internet

reinforces the bonds between its members, especially with the ones who have emigrated. The Internet also allows cross-generational communication such as when mothers are able to check on their children using Facebook, chatting with them or even playing with them. The Internet, through the information it provides, is also perceived as a means to improve and reinforce the women's caring roles as mothers, wives or daughters.

Internet technology enables a wide range of activities, and although the women may only indulge in a few, these few are very much appreciated. They may not shop online, for example, but they do enjoy window shopping. They also combine online work and leisure activities. Since the women are teachers and students they mainly use the Internet for educational purposes. The key idea here is 'information ubiquity' or the fact that "information on the Web is generally accessible anytime and anywhere" (Rezabakhsh, Bornemann et al. 2006: 12). The potential of the Internet for education is "limitless and exciting" (Hassan 2009: 49) and "ideally suited for obtaining much information on a particular subject in a very short order" (ibid.: 51).

When the women acknowledge the information potential of the Internet, they are recognizing what Ellsworth had already noted in 1994 that the Internet is "the largest reservoir of knowledge ever known to this planet" and so far it has never stopped growing. The women praise the Internet for its usefulness and have an instrumental attitude towards it. And this attitude is not exclusive to this group of women; when Sørensen, Faulkner et al. speak about strategies of exclusion and inclusion of women in technology, they state that "duty and utility are seen as features of women's approach" (2011: 60). So the Internet works as instrumentalism taken to the highest pitch (Hassan 2009: 51). For Monsuwé, Dellaert et al. usefulness is the perception that using a specific technology will enhance or improve our performance, and this becomes evident when this technology does not entail special effort to the user (2004: 107). When the Internet is perceived as an effortless technology, the women feel intrinsically motivated to use it because there is a factor of 'enjoyment'. In other words they

engage in activities that give them pleasure and may provide them with ways to escape from the stress of everyday duties.

Within the myriad of possibilities that the Internet offers to its users, its interactive capacity allows the women to experiment with behaviours that encourage them into participation and disclosure. In general, the Internet fosters high levels of self-disclosure (Joinson 2001: 178) and the concept of anonymity is fundamental in this regard. Some of the women feel that they can be more open, more daring, be more ‘themselves’; “anonymity of the self to others allows ‘one to express one’s true mind, or authentic self, unfettered by concerns of self-presentations and might lead to a reduction in conformity to group norms” (Joinson 2001: 180). So, the Internet offers these women a certain sense of freedom and control and this makes them less vulnerable.

As a closing remark here, the Internet and the space it produces, the cyberspace, is inhabited by embodied situated beings (Cohen 2007: 213) who live its advantages and disadvantages according to their individualities and their context. And contradictory as it may seem, they can sense the positive and negative sides of the Internet contemporarily in the same situation or activity. Thus, contradiction is a constant in the women’s discursive approach. I will now move on to develop this idea further.

9.1.3 CONTRADICTIONS OR DIFFERENT POSSIBILITIES?

Above I developed two opposing discourses that I identified from the women’s accounts: “the good and the evil” side of the Internet. However, and as already mentioned, contradictory statements were present at all levels, they covered the context, the Internet and all the layers of which the cyberspace is constituted indiscriminately and in a general way: “the ‘physical’ substrate of computers themselves; the ‘syntactic’ layer of software and the ‘semantic’ layer of information and ideas” (Betz and Stevens 2013). In the following sentences I try to elaborate some other ideas expressed by the women; these sentences also show the way the women narrate their experiences and the different stands they take in

the discursive process of the single narratives. These voices also reflect ongoing general social discourses which, most of the time, are opposing:

On the Internet any kind of information is available ≠ I cannot find what I am looking for online
The Internet is the best working tool ≠ The Internet is the ideal place to waste your time
Gender is invisible on the Internet ≠ People behave differently according to their gender
The Internet mirrors social differences ≠ The Internet allows everybody to be equal
Men are better at computers than women ≠ Men and women have the same skills
The Internet is expensive ≠ The Internet is not expensive
Piracy is bad and illegal ≠ We need Internet piracy

When identifying discourses about specific a phenomenon such as the Internet, one is able to recognize dominant ideas or areas that offer "subject positions" for individuals to assume (Gavey 1989); in other words, they represent the sharing of "the same common sense assumptions" which tend to remain stable or to change (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 142). Thus, discourses reveal themselves as "fixations of meaning that have unstable relations to one another" (ibid.: 143) and they should be treated as analytical concepts that help to frame, in this case, the experience of the women. However, this does not mean that they are living a contradictory, incoherent experience; on the contrary, these discourses or positions offer a range of possibilities that give sense to their actions and thoughts according to the activity or situation they are going through. In other words, contradictory discourses are even necessary since they provide different levels of agency and power. Discourses vary in their authority; some of them appear to be more "natural" than others depending on the context. Discourses deny their own partiality and gain their authority by appealing to common sense. So, most of the time, discourses, which support and perpetuate existing power relations, tend to constitute the subjectivity of most people most of the time (in a given place and time) (Gavey 1989: 464).

It is the "interplay between discourses that has social consequences" (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 145). In the case of the Internet, these discourses explain why

the women do or do not do certain things online; for example, why they hardly ever chat with strangers, why they do not buy online or why they need to be online. Discourses must be coherent and valid and also feasible in practice, but this does not rule out the possibility that they may be objected to and contested. If subjects are fragmentary, inconsistent and contradictory as poststructuralism proposes (Gavey 1989: 465), a logical consequence is the natural coexistence of contradictory discourses within oneself. Johnson expressed that the Internet has an “enormous positive as well as negative potential” (2008: 73), but this is so not only for what it entails in terms of media and content, but also because its users, human beings, have that positive and negative potential as well. Moreover, here we are not dealing with real opposites but with a range of coexisting possibilities, and this allows the formulation of discourses in between or conciliatory discourses which actually have the power of transforming what previously seemed to be fixed opposing meanings. Let us see some examples of these ‘in between’ discourses:

The Internet can help us keep things as they are or it can help us to change them

The problem is not accessing the Internet, but having the skills to use it

There is no gender difference, there is just different education

The Internet is not good or bad, it depends on how we use it

This type of discourse that ultimately places the responsibility on the human being and not on technology is the one that promises to take the discussion to a level beyond the good and evil dichotomy. And this shows once more that the Internet is a work in progress, and “in spite of its apparent wonders, the Internet is not magic...” (Waskul 2005: 52), and we are still in the process of learning how to come to terms with it and live our lives through it.

9.2 WHICH INTERSECTIONS ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

In chapter four I focused on a brief description of the analytical reach of Intersectionality theory within feminist studies. I stated that this theory helps to build an explanatory model of a phenomenon taking into account the several

dimensions or categories of intersection. I ask myself if, in the case of the women's Internet experience, it is possible to speak of 'neat' identifiable categories. My answer is 'yes and no', which does not mean a 'maybe'.

The answer should be 'no' if we think in terms of the classical triad of class, gender and race, or any other kind of specific social labelling. This triad that takes into account social categories, points out differences among groups of women, but not specifically between individual women. I argue that a phenomenological appropriation of the intersectional approach that puts into play the personal and the intersubjective can provide a better insight of individual differences. Therefore, the answer is a 'yes' if we take into account the idea of objective and subjective dimensions intersecting, i.e. the factors that are part of the women's context and culture (onto which they may or may not have a relative power to act upon) and the factors that are part of their intentionality and embodied intersubjectivity, such as emotions and feelings.

Among the contextual factors that are perceived as having a direct impact on the women's Internet experience are the structural or systemic ones; the civil insecurity, the economic and technological conditions of the country and the legal framework of power structures. At a personal level: their individual economy (related to their acquisitive power), their occupation (associated to their level of education), their social roles, and their social relationships, with family being the most important and influential institution in their lives. At an interpersonal and intersubjective level, we find internalized social values, their status, their perceived knowledge and skills, and their feeling and emotions, which surely are related to the way they 'live' all the other aspects mentioned earlier.

At this point the reader must be thinking that I chose the easy way out by putting all the elements in the one basket. This is not quite true: firstly because I consider that 'all' the elements would produce an endless list and one certainly not possible to be reproduced in one paragraph, and secondly because pointing out so many factors is just an attempt to provide a comprehensive view of the

complexity of the intersecting elements. Besides, I believe that my emphasis on three different levels - the structural, the personal and the intersubjective (combining objective and subjective dimensions) - provides an analytical frame that can give an account of the ‘differences among women’, about which intersectionality theory is concerned.

In chapter four I also explained that intersectionality theory principles had, to a certain extent, inspired me in the formulation of my research questions and I conceived sets of questions related to specific topics such as womanhood, life stage, educational background and Internet skills. But a pluralistic methodological approach also gave me room to work with the principles of grounded theory while collecting and analysing the data. This is the reason why my initial ideas transformed throughout the process and my opinion changed on which elements I should prioritize or which should be the main intersecting dimensions. I did my best to allow the text ‘to speak for itself’, so I started by discussing the ideas which I perceived as the most important in the women’s narratives. Although these ideas inspired the sequence of the chapters in this dissertation, only now do I group them in distinct categories which resist essentialism and only now do I try to show the relationship between the objective and subjective dimensions.

9.2.1 THE STRUCTURAL LEVEL

The structural level has to with the environment understood in its broader sense; all the domains and systems from the economic, political, social, and even the natural ecosystem. ‘System’ here is not understood in a rigid way⁶⁵, “each system, whether domain or set of social relations, can have a different spatial and temporal reach. Systems are over-lapping and non-nested” (Walby 2007: 459). In this regard, the elements I highlight within the environment that directly affect and influence the way the women experience the Internet are the ones that Walby

⁶⁵ Complexity theory provides conceptual innovations in various disciplines, including social theory, and revises the notion of system: “The notion that each system has as its environment all other systems is used to replace the rigid notion of a hierarchy of sub-systems by a much more fluid conception of the mutual impact of systems” Walby, S. (2007). “Complexity Theory, Systems Theory, and Multiple Intersecting Social Inequalities.” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 37(4): 449-470.

(2007) calls institutionalized domains in which she includes economy, polity, violence, and civil society. In fact, these domains are sets of social relations that never saturate their own territory since they allow multiple relations and intersections. Systems should not be understood as being constituted of parts that make up a definite whole, but as flexible domains that take all others as their own environment (2007: 461).

Among environmental elements which most affect the women's experience are the ones to which Helsper (2010) refers to as 'offline inequalities'. She claims for instance that income and education do affect the way people engage with technology. In Bolivia, the health of the economic system has an impact on the technological conditions and the individual choices of Internet access. The geopolitical situation of the country is also a factor very much related to the Internet connection availability and its quality. And the financial and banking system is not the ideal one to foster the growth of online transactions.

While economy is very important for determining the quality and quantity of technological access, education and computer training also play fundamental roles in affecting the attitude, capability and skills required for Internet use and the full exploitation of its potential. In this regard, the women's own experience with online education is an enriching one, making them aware of the disadvantages and advantages of using the Internet in education in general.

Nonetheless, one of the structural factors which most affects the women's perception of the Internet and their subsequent actions is the environment of crime and violence in which all Bolivians are immersed. Bolivia is a country that has a history of chronic instability (Crabtree and Whitehead 2008) and the media constantly reminds every citizen of this fact. The lack of a legal framework to protect people offline and online in the face of crime engenders a feeling of mistrust towards anything to do with the Internet, both within the individual and the social imaginary. Let us remember that "cyberspace is not a space in any traditional sense, but we experience it as though it possesses physical attributes, if

only by association and analogy” (Betz and Stevens 2013: 44), so we move around and live in it as we do in our neighbourhood, city or world.

9.2.2 THE PERSONAL LEVEL

The personal level refers to the immediate environment of the women, their living conditions and their close relationships. Here we can also place the type of upbringing they had, how supportive their families and especially their parents were in relation to their education in general and towards the use of computers specifically. Albeit seemingly unconscious of the fact, many of the women were raised in families whose members were early adopters of Internet technology in Bolivia; this can be inferred from the year when they first gained access to computers and Internet at home.

The women’s occupation and the type of university studies they undertook influence not only their interest in computers and the Internet world, but also their level of computer skills and their confidence in using them. As most of the women are teachers, they need to do constant research for their courses and regularly update their abilities and subject knowledge. This is one of the reasons why they were currently undertaking a postgraduate course in education and technology, which in turn was improving the Internet skills which they considered to be their weakest, such as content related and creation skills. Their current individual and family economy (acquisitive power) is an important element that affects the quality of their Internet access in terms of speed, type of device, time and place of connection.

Group context is also something to take into account when referring to Internet use. The Internet, although thought of as a means to be connected to the entire world, actually allows the connection between many individual others. This ‘other’ is mostly someone we have the freedom to choose and can be a family member, friend, colleague, or even a user who is a complete stranger to us. Offline and online social networks form part of the women’s everyday relationships and they clearly constitute a social capital that can influence their

ideas or thoughts, undermine their goals or expectations or give companionship and support (Heaney and Israel 2008: 191).

Social support in this regard is very important in the women's Internet experience, since they clearly get emotional gratification from their online relationships with family and friends. This can be clearly observed when they were talking about family and how their role in the family and the importance they give to family relationships influences both their offline and online behaviour. At another level, they also get instrumental support from friends and family members when they need help or advice on technical issues. They can also get informational support when they access forums or group discussions online.

Offline interpersonal interaction and relationships are so important in Bolivia that they also permeate the women's attitude online. One of the reasons why they are not 'at ease' with online education and online shopping, for instance, is the lack of face-to-face interaction. For the same reason there is a preference for calling and video chatting instead of sending written messages.

Undoubtedly, the appropriation of new technologies such as the Internet is anchored in distinctive cultural preferences and values. The users are "embodied users – selves ultimately interwoven with a specific body in a specific history, community and culture" (Ess 2002: 18). Therefore, social relationships and roles are also very relevant at a personal level. The women feel, judge and give a special significance (different types of rights and duties) to their roles of daughter, wife, mother, teacher and student. Bolivia has developed a society of contradictions; sometimes Bolivian women enjoy privileged and powerful positions, but at other times they are placed in a network of relationships permeated by practices soaked in machismo ideology (Galvan 2011: 57) and this has a direct impact on the way they experience the Internet.

9.2.3 THE INTERSUBJECTIVE LEVEL

Even if roles, together with moral values, ideologies and stereotypes, are learned, produced, reproduced, resisted and changed through social interaction, they are also a constitutive part of our subjectivity. They are both interpersonally and intersubjectively created and transformed. Sometimes they are consciously expressed and at other times unconsciously felt. They are internalized through social practice and externalized in the same way. The women acknowledged that they are influenced by others' behavioural expectations when online, and for that reason they would not do certain things or do others.

In this research, the intrinsic relationship between subjectivity and objectivity is self-evident. The context cannot be separated from the individual internal aspects such as emotions and feelings. They are also constitutive parts of the meaning of our lived experience. When the women feel different emotions while on the Internet it is because something is "happening", i.e. they are being "affected" by something. They fear something, they are guilty of something, they are happy about something, and they hope something (Ahmed 2007). If "affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (Ahmed 2007: 29), then the victory of the positive emotions over the negative ones will preserve and maintain their Internet experience.

The fact that they can feel different emotions towards the Internet means that they are "affected" by it or as Gregg and Seigworth (2010) affirm, the women are experiencing "forces of encounter" and this "gives them a vital force that goes beyond emotion. It is the capacity to act and be acted upon" (2010: 1-2). Emotions are therefore *intentional* in the phenomenological sense (directed toward objects), as well as being *affective* (contact with objects) (Ahmed 2007: 32). When the women are affected, in this case by the Internet, they evaluate or judge and act accordingly. It is then that their agency is constituted by the interaction of all dimensions: the structural, personal and intrapersonal, in other words, a combination of objectivity and subjectivity that resists essentialism.

At this point, I would like to emphasize once again the specific elements that intersect and have a crucial influence on the way in which these particular Bolivian women experience the Internet. The elements are in three levels and are as follows: Structural; the economy of the country, the legal framework, the technical conditions and civil insecurity. Personal: social roles, social relationships, individual economy, occupation-education and personal interests. Intersubjective: moral and values, status, perceived knowledge and skills, feelings and emotions. Here I argue that the elements of the structural level make the women's experience, in a way, a common and shared one; the women are Bolivian and the country's culture and characteristics cannot be ignored. However, the closer we get to the personal and intersubjective levels the experience becomes unique to their individualities. Paradoxically as it may seem, the different levels give the analysis a universal value, but it is what is contained within these levels, the specificities, that makes the experience unique to these women.

All the elements mentioned above were present when the women talked about their Internet experience, producing a certain mindset, evident in the underlying discourses, which has practical consequences for the way they use and value the Internet.

9.3 HOW ABOUT GENDER?

When I started discussing gender in chapter seven, I affirmed that I felt it was the 'substance' that could 'glue' together all the elements or dimensions involved in the women's Internet experience. I still think this to be the case as gender is present at all levels, and I like the notion of substance when speaking about gender because it is fluid, it is a permeative category. Gender can be discussed from a macro perspective, as a sociological event, but also from a micro one as an individual psychological and physical experience. To engage in a discussion about gender implies a discussion about both the outside and inside of a person. In this regard, Cosgrove affirms "essentialized views of gender ignore the

contingency of behavior and mask the ways in which context matters” (2000: 248). This is, “people do gender, both pre-reflectively (unconsciously) and reflectively (consciously)” (ibid.: 250); in other words, gender is a constant practice, it is performed objectively and subjectively. However, here my intention is not to go into the complexity of the concept, but to point out that gender also matters in the women’s Internet experience. For this, I need to move on from discourse analysis and call again on the assistance of phenomenology.

Cosgrove (2000) questions discourse analysis as the ideal and only methodology to research gender phenomena, and examines the pertinence of the phenomenological approach, especially if we are interested in dealing with the concept of experience. For this she suggests that first of all, the idea that phenomenology is a synonym of subjectivity must be disregarded. In fact phenomenology acknowledges objectivity and subjectivity in a reversed way, focusing on subjective accounts rather than the objectivity of the researcher. Studies should focus on reality, but reality here is neither understood as a product from our heads, nor something from the outside world; therefore reality is neither mental nor material, but experiential. Trying to understand our world calls for an understanding on how it is lived, how it is experienced (Cosgrove 2000: 255).

In empirical research “gender has been identified as an important factor shaping use of computing and communications technologies” (Chesley 2006: 590), and this research is not going to contradict this; however, the nodal point is not about gender dualisms, but about how gender is lived and this is quite elusive since “our experience of ourselves as gendered individuals is necessarily more fragmented, contradictory and far less gender rigid than we might appreciate” (Cosgrove 2000: 250). The women involved in this research are very much conscious of their gender, but gender matters only in specific situations when they are ‘reminded’ of being gendered, when for some reason or another, their womanhood is a hindrance or a benefit.

In my analysis, I have a preference for the idea of womanhood in relation to the women's Internet experience because, although gender is not biologically determined, its practice involves the body and the offline world; the Internet and its space. As a matter of fact, the cyberspace is inhabited by embodied situated beings. The user is always a body, a gendered body; therefore bodily transformations also transform our experiences (Ahmed 2007: 31). In the case of the women this is quite obvious when they relate how the fact of being a mother has led them to adopt different online habits. So, gender in interaction with generation and life-stage does affect Internet use (Helsper 2010). However, there are also less obvious examples that are related to the way the female body is lived online or how it comes to matter when they are harassed over a chat situation.

To think of the embodied situated experience of the user is a necessary inclusive conception of the Internet phenomenon. There is a need to evaluate how bodies turn toward things because that gives us hints on how gender matters, but how much it matters depends on the person, the situation and the specific time and place.

9.4 THE SELF AND THE CONTEXT: INTERNET INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITY

As has been made clear so far, a sound analysis of the women's experience takes into account the broader context and the individual and personal elements which have a direct effect on the way the women think, feel and act in relation to the Internet. By 1997 Cerulo had already affirmed that new communication technologies are changing the way identity is constructed as they combine public and private spheres. So, maybe, once more the linking of micro and macro aspects of a person's context can provide a conceptual frame that assists in the comprehensive understanding of the always-debated concept of identity.

Thus, I would like to strengthen this exploration of experience by addressing the topic of identity: Is it possible to say that the women experience the Internet the way they do because of their 'identity'? Or that their 'identity' is being changed

because of the use of the Internet as Cerulo suggests? The answer is affirmative if we understand identity in the sense Hekman (2000) does: identity is “an ungrounded ground”. Identity presents itself as an ever-changing coherent narrative that contains moveable continuities and contradictions, where bodies and social scripts interact.

Social scientists have been dealing with the ‘identity’ problem from different perspectives, and there is no single answer to explain why we are who we are, or what makes us become who we are. Some studies have focused on the individual’s sense of the self, others on the collective and social influence; thus the approaches are as diverse as the researchers’ theoretical fields of study (Cerulo 1997). For instance, Castells is a clear proponent of the study of identity under the lens of macro social influence. Castells (2004) argues the existence of a plurality of identities for an individual or a collective actor; since identity for him is “the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes, that is given priority over other sources of meaning” (2004: 4). For him, history, geography, biology, religion, power apparatuses and institutions are the materials from which identities are constructed (ibid.: 7). For Castells “subjects are not individuals, even if they are made by and in individuals. They are the collective social actor through which individuals reach holistic meaning in their experience” (ibid.: 8-9). Within this line of thought, what individuals do on Internet (and also offline) defines the social organization as a whole. This could explain why criminality online and offline is a feared and censured social pattern, how technological inequalities among countries have an impact on the appropriation and consumption of the Internet, and even how individual societal roles are produced and reproduced within online behaviour.

The collective understanding of the individual generates a category definition based on race, nationality, age, class, gender, occupation and many others. But where does subjectivity fit into all of this? If subjectivity takes into account what Venn (2006: 79) calls a “substantive acting, thinking and feeling being”, then a

complete understanding of how people live and experience needs to include this personal aspect or what Byrne (2003) labels ‘self-identity’. For Byrne (2003), investigating ‘social-identity’ and ‘self-identity’ can illustrate the relationship between narratives and discourses, of the interaction between practices of the self and the social identifications, and ultimately explain agency and the possibility of transforming identities. However, “disentangling self-identity from social-identity” (Byrne 2003: 458) is done only for analytical purposes because if we insist on conceptual language dichotomies we fail to capture experience (Wetherell 2008). The complexity about gender identity, for instance, is due to the fact that it meshes a social categorization and an individual private sense of self. Gender identity is “simultaneously internal and external to the person” (Byrne 2003: 445).

Identity and experience are notions that produce a lot of debate. Butler, among other authors, challenged the notion of identity as something fixed and essential, such a thing as a ‘woman’ does not exist since this is a concept that refers to a ‘substanceless gender identity’. However, my reflection here adheres to Hekman’s position when she advocates that a middle ground is possible. She proposes that “identity can and must be defined as having a stable ground”, what she calls an “ungrounded ground” (Hekman 2000: 290). So Hekman thinks of an identity with a ‘core’ which is socially constructed, and this core is a stable concept of the self. However, this does not mean that she is taking an essentialist position since a stable sense of self provides the basis from which choices are made; it is a necessary component of selfhood (ibid.: 298). People need to experience themselves as coherent entities as this allows them to cope with the ever-changing nature of their existence. “The self must experience itself as possessing an internal world, a core identity from which decisions are made. This makes coherent subjectivity possible” (Hekman 2000: 301). This subjectivity which constructs self-identity is bound up with “the fragile nature of the biography which the individual ‘supplies’ about herself. A person’s identity is not

to be found in behaviour, nor –important though this is- in the reaction of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*” (Giddens 1991: 54).

Therefore, as Haynes states, “narrative renders individual lives intelligible both by linking together some disparate elements, and by connecting individual lives to broader aspects of humanity” (2006: 402). To be able to grasp the dynamics of individual and social actions, it is wise to depart from specific situations and people’s accounts whose sometimes descriptive narrations provide more understanding than the analysis of abstract structures that prevent us from seeing how the self and society are in permanent negotiation. For Waskul (2005), examining ambiguous situations where the self and society actively negotiate provides great clarity on their dynamics. This is why I chose to base my analysis on the actual words of my interviewees, quoting them on the different topics in order to let the reader agree or disagree with my examination.

The women involved in my research, as any other human beings, form their identity, their “ungrounded ground” through intersubjective mechanisms. Thus, their identity “once crystallized is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations” (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 194). Socialization is an ongoing process that tries to safeguard a “symmetry between objective and subjective reality” (1991: 167). We are who we are because of the way we maintain our subjective reality. Put simply, everyone “pretty much is what he is supposed to be. In such a society identities are easily recognizable, objectively and subjectively” (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 184). It is a matter of subjecthood, “having a viable identity, being accepted as a subject, is necessary for social existence” (Hekman 2008: 113). Consequently, the women experience the Internet the way they do because of their identities, because of the way they choose to be and are allowed to be, with all the personal adjectives they assume: Bolivian, young, old, student, teacher, single, married, middle class, poor, rich, strong, shy, educated... woman. Their identity is shaped by the way they live in society, and it is transformed over time and in space, and through new online and offline experiences.

Thus, just before the end of this section, I dare to propose a model of analysis as a methodological exercise when ‘experience’ is our object of study. I suggest that the crucial intersections to be sought, which are relevant to a specific phenomenon, have to be identified in the analysis of any or several expressions of that experience, and to be found in the two constitutive indissoluble parts our identity - social-identity and self-identity - and their relation to the specific context. In this way, pointing out objective and subjective factors is unavoidable and provides a more holistic and comprehensive analysis.

9.5 NARRATIVE, DISCOURSE AND LANGUAGE

In chapter three I mention that my methodological choices are rather eclectic and pragmatic not only in terms of the theories and concepts used but also because I combine the analysis of discourse and narrative. This is the reason why I now feel the need to address again these last two -discourse and narrative- which are sometimes analysed separately and at others interchangeably. When Dorer states that “individual narratives are seen as parts of social discourses, which individuals perceive in differing ways and construct meanings for, integrating them into everyday practice” (2002:70), she is acknowledging how narrative, discourse and practice are not meant to be understood as separable units, but as one coherent expression.

We live in a world of expressions and from the moment we are born the world is speaking to us. Moi affirms that what made Beauvoir’s work so outstanding is that she managed to take “the ordinary and everyday as the starting point for a serious thought” (2006: 1739) and this is the reason why we are always called to analyze the world we live in. Theorists need to permanently “rethink fundamental assumptions such as language and meaning... the body and the soul” (Moi 2006: 1735).

Goldie affirms that “the impersonal stance of the sciences (here I emphasize classical positivist science) leaves nothing out; in another sense, it leaves much out, for it leaves out our ordinary, everyday way of thinking of our emotional

experiences and what these experiences are experiences of” (2002: 249). For Goldie, science is impersonal, but “our ordinary way of thinking about emotional experience is personal” (2002: 249). So, clearly there is, to say the least, an unresolved epistemological question. And to make things worse, when attempting to study the personal, theories such as phenomenology and discourse analysis do not provide replicable methodologies (Cosgrove 2000: 256). So, the question is if we can ever be sure of our analysis or understanding. Ordinary language philosophers would respond according to Moi “that we are often quite sure about meaning, and that even severe mistakes, misunderstandings, and plain puzzlement don’t change our usual understanding of the relevant concepts” (2009: 812). The focus should be on understanding situations and not on concepts. There is no such thing as ‘ideal meaning’; whatever we say has a sense, and even the vaguest sentence has a perfect order (2009: 815).

Moi, reflecting on Wittgenstein’s work, advocates the understanding of language as use, practice and act. People are responsible for their words (Moi 2009: 815), and I add here that we are responsible for the interpretation we make of those words as well. In language we learn the world together (ibid.: 817). Language is not only a form of expression about something, but something in itself. “Language has to do with the other, the human body, the human mind, existence, morality and politics. It immerses us in a world of learning and teaching, of understanding and misunderstanding, madness and scepticism, isolation and solidarity, in short, the ordinary and everyday world in which we all live” (ibid.: 819).

If we separate language from the world, we remove it from the everyday. For ordinary language philosophy, language is not a negation, but the very condition of possibility of lived experience: turning towards ordinary language, we turn towards the world and towards others (Moi 2009: 820). We use language to narrate, to tell others about our lives and experiences and in narrating we give the reader the material to interpret the embedded discourses which in turn reveal our relation to the world and expose ourselves. So, “we give meaning to experiences

by virtue of the words that are available, and the resulting meanings contribute to producing the experience rather than being merely a description of the experience or an after-the-event occurrence” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 102).

What I have analysed throughout this dissertation has been the voice of women; the words the women used to relate pieces of the way they have lived, live and may well continue living the experience of the Internet. What they articulated was also a product of their interaction with me, so interviewer and interviewee learnt about the world together (as Moi puts it). I think the reader will do the same with this text, and maybe he/she will have a lot of questions, but that is the purpose and the challenge of language in use. As experience can be a resource for seeing things in a different way, narratives that show the complex and sometimes contradictory layers of experience are valuable in themselves because human beings eventually learn from experiences, from their own and from that of others. Studies focused solely on experience have been criticized because they do not produce political change; if, however, they assert “epistemic agency” (Stone-Mediatore 1998: 127), then the possibility of change does lie within them.

9.6 LIVED EMBODIED INTERNET EXPERIENCE

As a final reflection, I will try to locate ‘experience’ within the discussion of the “new settlement” or the new scientific paradigm that Hekman (2008) argues is in the process of being constituted (which I have mentioned already in the last part of chapter four). The new settlement to which Hekman refers should accomplish “what the postmoderns failed to do: a deconstruction of the material/discursive dichotomy that retains both elements without privileging either” (Alaimo and Hekman 2008: 6). Within this new emerging paradigm, feminist theorists have much to contribute because they bring materiality to the discussion without disregarding the insights of language (Hekman 2008: 107).

Hekman (2008) mentions Barad’s (1996) epistemological and ontological framework: agential realism as one of the approaches that discusses the relationship between the material and the discursive, nature and culture, and how

agency is produced between them. "Agential realism grounds and situates knowledge claims in local experiences: objectivity is literally embodied; agential realism privileges neither the material nor the cultural: the apparatus of bodily production is material-cultural, and so is agential reality..." (Barad 1996: 179).

Barad (1996) explains that reality is "things-in-phenomena": things are not before or after a phenomenon, but are happening. "Phenomena are the embodiment of cultural practices within theory" (Barad 1996: 183) and so is the Internet. As stated in chapter five, the Internet is technological materiality, but it is also culture; the Internet is changing our relationship with the world and vice versa. The Internet is our mediated technological interaction with the world and it is a world in itself, our world. When the discussion is about its materiality, the domesticated wires and artefacts, it mainly refers to things, but let us not forget that "we are moved by things. And in being moved, we make things" (Ahmed 2010: 33), in other words we make culture. And in being moved we are touched at all levels: rationally and emotionally, bodily and mentally.

Agency is constituted in the intra-action⁶⁶ of all dimensions, from the structural to the emotional. "Agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has" (Barad 2003: 826). Agency is not an attribute, it is 'doing/being' (ibid.: 827). Agency, therefore, is about possibilities; we may be constrained, but not determined in our intra-actions. Cosgrove advocates that phenomenology privileges agency since it emphasizes the lived world and the interpersonal realm in the constitution of identity (2000: 258); in other words, the grounded core of identity is formed by the relational self or "distributed self between its external and internal world" (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 109).

⁶⁶ "The notion of intra-action (in contrast to the usual "interaction", which presumes the prior existence of independent entities) represents a profound conceptual shift... Agential intractions are specific causal material enactments that may or may not involve "humans". Indeed, it is through such practices that the differential boundaries between "humans" and "nonhumans", "culture" and "nature", the "social" and the "scientific" are constituted". Barad, K. (2003). "Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter." *Signs* 28(3): 801-831.

In this research all the elements discussed - contextual factors, social categories, cultural elements, and intersubjective dynamics - are boundaries designed in this mesh of intertwined external and internal worlds to give sense and to get to an understanding of the phenomenon under study; and we must not forget that “boundaries are not our enemies; they are necessary for making meanings...” (Barad 1996: 187). “Meaning is not a property of individual words or groups of words but an ongoing performance of the world in its differential intelligibility” (Barad 2003: 821). In this regard, the women’s Internet experience is all those dimensions and more. The intra-action of humans and Internet technology is lived in a complex way; it transforms both of them in the very experience which is only accountable by its expressions. This techno-human engagement is only possible through embodied praxis and lived as a whole. For Ihde (2003), the embodiment of our technological experience is eventually an existential relation with the world.

I am conscious that my finishing point for this work could be only half way through the analytical journey; but at what point do we draw the line? Answers are quite often incomplete and partial and they respond to specific standpoints. Human beings, like the Internet, are a work in progress, and that which matters is to make progress, to move on. Science is like experience: a “*movement between meanings and matter, word and world, interrogating and redefining boundaries, a dance not behind or beyond, but in ‘the between’, where knowledge and being meet*” (Barad 1996: 185).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE

GUIDE TO SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

FIRST ROUND OF PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

(PERSONAL DATA)

INTRODUCTION

1. Self-introduction
2. When speaking about technology what comes to your mind?
3. Why are you interested in this course on Education and Technology?
4. What does the Internet mean to you?
5. What would happen if tomorrow you could not access the Internet?

TIME LINE - ACCESS

6. Do you remember the first time you used a computer?
7. Have you ever taken computer lessons?
8. When was the first time you accessed the Internet? (dial up / adsl)
9. How, when and where do you connect to the Internet?
10. Do you know your Internet speed connection?
11. Are you satisfied with the quality of the Internet connection you have?
12. Who pays for your Internet connection?
13. How much do you pay?
14. Do you consider you access the Internet more now than before? Why?
15. Do you keep yourself updated with technology?
16. How do you solve a computer problem? Do you ask anyone for help?
17. Do you buy the software you use?
18. How do you feel when online?
19. Do you think you spend too much time online and do you neglect your offline relationships?

USES

20. What type of media do you prefer for communication?
21. Have you had a particularly good experience using the Internet?
22. Have you had a particularly bad experience using the Internet?
23. What do you think has the most influence on your Internet experience?
24. What do you usually do online? Activities?
25. When online do you feel relaxed and happy or do you see it as a duty?
26. Do you participate in social media?
27. Do you know people online that you don't know in person?
28. Do you upload personal information online?

29. Do you have a blog or a website?
30. Do you participate in online forums?
31. How much do you know about online security?
32. Where and how do you get information online? What sources?
33. Do you usually get the information you are looking for?
34. Do know how to hack?
35. What do you think hinders your use of the Internet?
36. Do you look for information in different languages?
37. In relation to what you are able to do now while using the Internet, is it different from the past?
38. What are your future expectations regarding Internet use?
39. Do you think that as you are a woman your possibilities of accessing and using the Internet are different?
40. What benefits does the Internet provide you with, if any?
41. What label do you prefer: 'online', 'virtual' 'internet'? Why?
42. Could you elaborate a bit on the factors which you think exert an influence on your Internet use? (Socio-cultural group, life stage, skills, etc. Speaking about self-perceived position)

GUIDE TO SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

SECOND ROUND OF PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

PENDING ISSUES FROM THE FIRST ROUND

1. How important is family to you? And your work?
2. From the first round of interviews, I could see that earning money and family had an influence on your Internet use. What do you think of this?
3. Do you think there is a link between family and work and the Internet?
4. Do you think it is possible to make money using the Internet?
5. Can you imagine doing your present work or job-related activity without using the Internet?
6. How many e-mails do you get on average per day?
7. Do you prefer to talk or to write while online?
8. What leisure activities do you do online?
9. Which webpages do you usually visit?
10. Should the Internet be regulated? (Legal frame)

EDUCATION

1. Why are you interested in education?
2. Is there any relationship between education and the Internet?
3. How do you relate these two in practice?
4. What are the limitations of our context when using the Internet in education?
5. Has your idea about technology and the Internet changed since you started this course?
6. How much did you know before and how much do you know now?
7. Do you think you know how to use the Internet better or worse than your students?

OTHER GENERAL TOPICS

1. Do you think there are social classes in Bolivia?
2. Do you think the social class of a person has an effect on Internet use?
3. Do you think race also has an affect?
4. Do you think men and women use the Internet differently?
5. Have you seen any differences in use among your students?
6. Do you think the Internet is for a privileged few in Bolivia?
7. Do you think you are in a privileged position?
8. Do you consider yourself a leader in your field?
9. How about your technological skills?
10. Do you think the Internet can 'empower'?
11. Does not knowing languages (English for instance) affect our Internet use?
12. What is your level of English?
13. Do you think what people do on the Internet is related to cultural factors?

GUIDE TO GROUP INTERVIEWS

STATEMENTS FOR DISCUSSION

Stereotypes

1. Gender identity and the Internet

- On the Internet nobody knows if you are a woman or a man
- Online anonymity is beneficial for women
- Online anonymity is dangerous for women
- Since the Internet revolution women work more than before
- Women use the Internet but they know nothing about computers

2. Cultural aspects

- Bolivians are irresponsible online and offline
- Bolivians are humble in online forums and group discussions
- In social media 'machista' practices are produced and reproduced
- Women chat, men play, women work, men research
- Bolivians are mistrustful, they will never buy online

3. Internet access and Internet use

- To be on Facebook all the time is just a habit
- The reason why people are not interested in the Internet is because they do not have money to pay for it
- The Internet is addictive
- Having children or being childless affects the way people use the Internet

4. Education and the Internet

- Using the Internet outside formal education is more instructive
- Women get more advantages from the Internet than men

GUIDE TO GROUP INTERVIEWS

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Gender identity and the Internet

- The gender-technology relationship is always stable
- Does the Internet reproduce or transform gender relations?
- Does the Internet have a gender value?
- The Internet lessens the workload for women
- Women online / offline
- Is there gender equality online?
- How do you feel as a female student on this course?

2. Cultural aspects

- How are our habits shaped? How do they change?
- Needs and practices online
- Is social media a need?
- Are socio-economic inequalities reflected online?
- Is the culture of a country reflected online?
- Are we Internet dependent?

3. Access and Internet use

- Influential factors: economy / education / gender (social identity)
- Personal factors: family, interests, gender
- Uses and gratifications
- Offline / online relationship
- Internet use: local or global
- Online freedom and autonomy
- Are we informed or entertained on the Internet?

4. ICTs / Education and the Internet

- Is the Internet used as an empowerment tool in Bolivia?
- Passive reception or active practice?
- How can people take advantage of the possibilities and opportunities that the Internet offers?
- What about our Internet skills?
Medium-related skills, content-related skills, communication skills, content-creation skills
- Is it possible to feel a 'sense of power' on the Internet? (Ability to achieve a goal)
- Internet impact: informal or formal education?

APPENDIX TWO

OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH SUBJECTS

#	NICK	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	EDUCATION	STUDIES	OCCUPATION / LAST JOB
1	Nora	25	Single, living with uncle, comes from a different city	Public school Public university	Pedagogy	Facilitator, consultancy
2	Sara	28	Single, living with parents	Private school Public university	Systems engineering Postgraduate diplomas	Logistics and human resources management
3	Ruby	30	Single, living alone	Public school Public university	Psychology Postgraduate diploma	Project coordinator
4	Ana	30	Married, one child	Private school Public university	Pedagogy Postgraduate diplomas	Responsible for school support
5	Lila	30	Single, living with mom Sister and niece	Private school Public university	Economy Postgraduate diplomas	Faculty coordinator / University Teacher
6	Inés	30	Married, one child Living with parents	Public school Public university	Pedagogy Postgraduate diploma	University teacher
7	Rosa	32	Single, living with parents	“Mixed ” system school Public university	Odontology Postgraduate diplomas	Dentist, school music teacher
8	Olga	32	Single, living with family	Private school Private university	Social Communication Master diploma	University teacher
9	Tati	33	Married, one child	Private school Public university	Economy Postgraduate diplomas	University teacher, consultant

10	Beta	33	Married, four children	Private school Private university	Systems engineering Postgraduate diplomas	Institute teacher Natural products dealer
11	Clara	34	Single, living with aunt	Public school Public university	Industrial engineering	Marketing consultancy
12	Emma	34	Married, one child	Private school Public university	Economy Postgraduate diplomas	University teacher, consultant
13	Cindy	34	Married, one child	Private school Private university	Industry engineering	University teacher
14	Brisa	35	Single, living with extended family	Private school Private university	Social Communications Postgraduate diplomas	University teacher
15	Fanny	38	Single, living with parents, siblings, others	Private school (Scholarship) Public university	Informatics Postgraduate diplomas	School and University teacher
16	Lyn	41	Married, three children	Private school Private university	Industry engineering Other diplomas	Institute teacher
17	Vivi	43	Single, living with father	Private school Private university	Systems engineering Postgraduate diplomas	University teacher
18	Isa	48	Divorced, one child	Public school Public university	Languages	Institute English teacher
19	Mili	49	Single, living with parents, sister, nephews	Private school Private university	Systems engineering Postgraduate diplomas	University teacher

APPENDIX THREE

YEAR AND AGE OF FIRST COMPUTER ACCESS AND INTERNET USE

#	NICKNAME	AGE WHEN INTERVIEWED	AGE FIRST PC ACCESS	YEAR FIRST PC ACCESS	AGE FIRST TIME ON INTERNET	YEAR FIRST TIME ON INTERNET
1	Nora	25	15	2002	15	2002
2	Sara	28	12	1996	12	1996
3	Ruby	30	16	1998	16	1998
4	Ana	30	18	1999	19	2000
5	Lila	30	6	1988	14	1996
6	Inés	30	15	1997	21	2003
7	Rosa	32	13	1993	19	1999
8	Olga	32	10	1990	21	2000
9	Tati	33	10	1989	21	1999
10	Beta	33	8	1986	18	1996
11	Clara	34	7	1987	20	1998
12	Emma	34	18	1995	19	1996
13	Cindy	34	12	1989	22	2000
14	Brisa	35	20	1997	22	1999
15	Fanny	38	19	1993	22	1996
16	Lyn	41	14	1984	25	1996
17	Vivi	43	20	1989	26	1995
18	Isa	48	20	1983	35	1998
19	Mili	49	17	1980	31	1994*

*Access while working at a government institution when the Internet was not yet widely available to the public.